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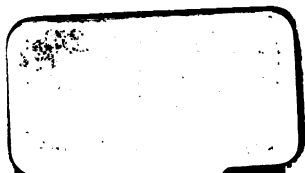
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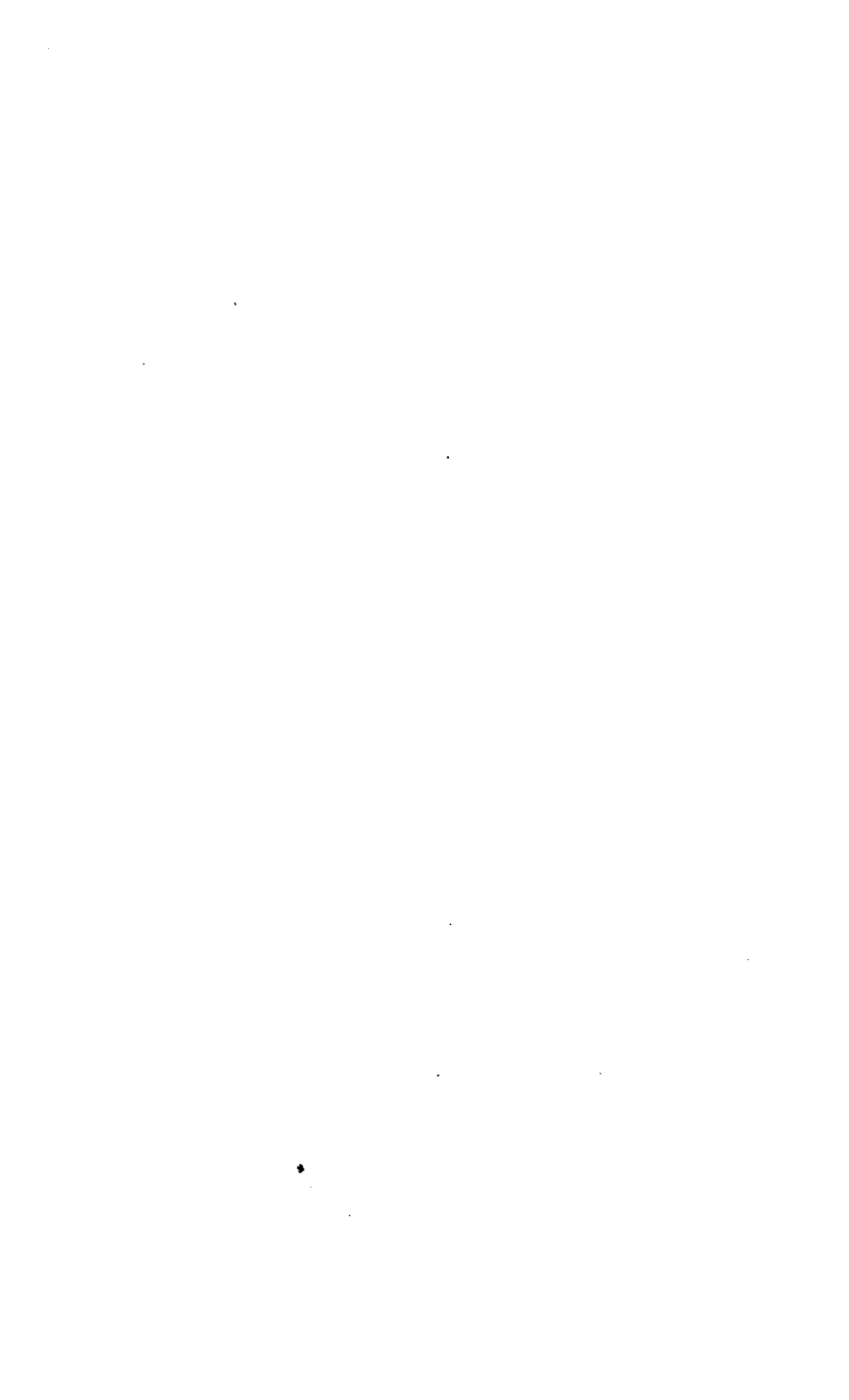






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THE HEIR OF VALLIS.

CHAPTER I.

WITHIN four-and-twenty hours of the events recorded in the last chapter, Charles Napier entered the town of S——, and rode direct to the hotel usually patronized by the members of Vallis House. The expression of firm undaunted resolution—a light of stern purpose in the eye—plainly evinced that angry and warring passions were within him. Addressing himself to the obsequious landlord, he inquired whether a gentleman of the name of Langton was awaiting him. A reply in the negative gave Napier evidently some annoyance.

“He has been at the court-house,” remarked the landlord: “a singular and violent case of assault hap-

pened this morning ; the hearing is only just over. I think you know Mr Wilton, Mr Napier." A sudden flush overspread Napier's face. Could the landlord have received an inkling of his purpose, and thus probed him ? Directing a steady glance on him who thus questioned him, he saw his suspicions were wrong, although there was something the man was anxious to reveal.

" Know Mr Wilton—yes !—Why do you ask ? " answered Napier. " Because, sir," said mine host of the Royal George, " a most extraordinary affair took place this morning, in which he was rather unpleasantly implicated. He was in company with Lord A—— and Sir Benjamin S——, walking down South Street this morning, when a great powerful fellow of a strong gipsy caste strode up to him, and requested him—so the evidence ran—to accompany him—where to, no one seems to know. Mr Wilton seems to have objected to this strange request ; and as he knew something of this person—so he said before the bench—which reflected on his respectability, he refused to move, using some strong expressions relative to this stranger's impudence, at the same time raising his cane as if to strike him ; whereon

this fellow closed with Mr Wilton, wrenched the stick with furious force from his hand, broke it over his head, and in the twinkling of an eye (so observers say) knocked him backward into the horse-pond, and then attempted to escape; but, as a crowd gathered round, he was taken into custody. As the court was sitting, he was taken before the bench at once; and I ran up to hear the case, for the town was ringing with it. The feeling was all with Mr Wilton, for Lord A—— and Sir Benjamin S—— stood manfully by him. The prisoner Pearson, for so he gave his name, glared like a chained tiger on Wilton and his friends as they told their tale. All went against him; he would give no account of himself; was fined in the extreme penalty for the assault, and called upon to find bondsmen to keep the peace; and Mr Whittaker would have committed him at once, but Mr Dyson opposed this on the plea, that the prisoner had had no time given him to apply to friends to come forward in his behalf. However it seemed all the same; no one at hand befriended him; and he was about to be removed in close custody, when Dr Powell and his friend Mr Langton hastily entered the court and tendered

themselves as surety. The ceremony was gone through, and Pearson was liberated. But, dear me," cried the landlord, breaking off, "here comes the very gentleman you were inquiring for, Mr Napier."

Napier's eye took the direction pointed out, and perceived Langton pacing his steed leisurely towards the hotel. Napier repaired to a private apartment as Langton joined him, anxious, it would seem, to avoid the notice of the loungers about the house.

Had not Napier's feelings been too closely engrossed by one stern idea, he would have perceived a vast change in Langton's manner and countenance as he greeted him.

In Napier's former intercourse with this gentleman, there was at times a brooding melancholy—a reserve—a never-varying watchfulness, which caused Napier considerable surprise. Now there was nothing of reserve, nothing left of that peculiar bitterness blending with interest in the voice which before so agitated Napier; content and cheerfulness were evident in the face; and though there was a great deal of anxiety in the eye, sincerity of the most earnest stamp beamed from it.

On entering the room to which Napier conducted him, Langton grasped his companion's hand, and scanned his countenance with an anxious sympathizing gaze. "I know all, Napier," he said, and his lip quivered—"Great God! what an extraordinary disclosure! I thought you would not fail me at this pinch. I delayed my summons until I had seen my poor relative alone. I have heard with my own ears a recountal of that man's villany, and am resolved——"

Langton gazed thoughtfully, and with deep feeling into Napier's face, and then asked, hardly above a whisper, "Has she indeed suffered much?"

"Suffered!" cried Napier bitterly—"A word that comprises only the bitterness of physical endurance is not in sense in her case, Langton!—Has she been tortured bodily and mentally?—Yes!—The sensitive nerve, the tender heart, feelings that beautify, and are a luxury to view in human nature, have undergone through that miscreant's instrumentality a fell rack and indignity." The speaker paused here; then, laying his hand upon his friend's arm, he said sternly, "There is no alternative.—Harry is absent.—I, as *the brother* of both"—As

these words fell, Langton turned suddenly away and paced the room with nervous and agitated step. "You must not speak thus," he said, with a voice of acute emotion,—“I am come to reason with you, but if you play upon my passions thus, you will render me more wayward than yourself.”

At this point, Dr Powell entered the apartment ; he glanced from one to the other of his friends, and muttered, “A pretty labour to control two such spirits as these.”

“You had better stop here, you will be wanted shortly,” said Napier to him.—“You know all !—What punishment awaits the worker of so much misery ?”

“A heavier one than you can inflict,” answered Dr Powell ; then, gazing steadily into Napier’s face, he said, “I see on what you have resolved—I implore you, Mr Napier—nay do not turn impatiently from me—you know how much I am interested in your welfare—to reflect on what you do. Think of those who are quite dependent on you now ; and remember this is no call of honour ; the by-laws of society have no claim in a case like this ; and, beside, you who are innocent may suffer equally

with the guilty. I grant you have bitter cause for indignation, and punishment must fall on that man's head, I am certain ; but your life should not be hazarded in an encounter with so marked a ruffian."

"Your argument boots nothing," was the answer, "I am resolved."

Napier now paced the room with rapid but irregular strides, and then said, with a haughty air that could not be mistaken, "His heart's blood shall pay the penalty of his gross villany. Yes, Harry, your honour shall be redressed. Inez, I will be your avenger, as your noble brother would have acted had he been here : am I not right, Langton ?" he cried, turning to the place at which he had seen his friend standing. But he was at fault—the person he looked for had thrown himself upon a couch at the further end of the apartment, and now held his face buried in his hands.

Dr Powell was confused too ; but he stepped hastily forward, saying, "Pause for one half-hour, Mr Napier—I speak on a friend's earnest authority—What"—he said quickly as if a thought had suddenly occurred to him—"if I can give you proof of dishonourable practices——"

"Dishonourable practices!" cried Napier, in a voice that caused the somewhat mercurial nerves of the doctor to thrill—"Can aught, I ask you, in the list of a libertine's damning propensities, evince more dishonour or rascality than the deed for which I seek redress? Ought not this crime to banish him from society—the gibe and scorn of honest men—a loathsome reptile in the sight of every woman—(At this point, Langton left the room, with a flushed and agitated countenance)—yet society, when it has pointed out the means of redress, and he *honourably* obeys my call, receives this man within its pale. It is not my place now—with thoughts like mine"—he said with a bitter smile—"to point out the imperfections in this system of redress adopted by my class. Enough, I, too, bow to the mandate of error and ignorance! Reason cannot at a moment alter an established custom. Nor can feelings, such as I now experience, lay down a principle consonant with common sense." And he strode to the balcony, as if bent on avoiding further expostulation, observing, as he crossed the room, "I trust Langton will not be absent long."

It was a lovely September night; earth and sky

were tranquil. It was a time and hour to inspire confidence in virtue ; and though Napier's mind was sorely perturbed, the scene operated with soothing effect. He turned away, shuddering it would seem ; a host of forms, of pure and anxious hearts, had flashed before his eye,—home, friends, and *one friend* at Mowbray. And again that voice fell upon his ear, and now the thought of hereafter came as a chart with the eternal law thereon, reality blending with the ideal : his heart was humbled, he dared not remain and speculate. He resisted that holy revelation, because, having gone so far with the sophistry of passion, his pride determined to support the principle he had allowed to influence his conduct, though his reason told him how erring it was.

Napier had re-entered the room ; his friend saw the expression of passion superseded by that of thoughtfulness, and arrived at a false conclusion.

“ We must deal gently,” whispered Dr Powell to Mr Langton, who had returned ; “ reflection is holding the balance between pride and reason ; if we are injudicious, we shall give evil influence the

turn, and then my dark foreboding will be realized.
—Would Mr Wilmott was come ! ”

Dr Powell then drew near to Napier and said :—

“ A beautiful night, Mr Napier, and how solemn the call for evening service ! Many a grateful heart is assembling in yon temple,” pointing to the church, “ and will shortly acknowledge how vast the privilege which yet enables them to provide for the future.”

Napier looked his kind friend calmly in the face, and, laying his hand upon his shoulder, replied :—

“ I understand you, but my determination is fixed—God pardon me for what I do. Langton, to your task. Arrange a meeting, and speedily ; he has been more vile than an assassin ; who shall punish him, if I do not ? ”

“ The retributive justice of Him whose laws you are about to outrage,” said Mr Wilmott, who had noiselessly entered the room, and who now stood amongst the party there, erect and dignified through the moral courage that inspired him to step between his friend and the wilfulness of his purpose. Napier started, for to him

Mr Wilmott's presence was as unexpected as unwished for. "The retributive justice of Him whose laws you are bent on setting at defiance," he continued in a voice of thrilling solemnity. "But can you really contemplate committing so fatal an error, Napier? Would you be tempted by that sophistry which owes its influence to the depravity of a baneful school, and dare, in your false pride and vanity, to assume an authority which belongs only to your Maker? The punishment of that ruthless man may come, but it will be through weapons which are not carnal, but mighty through Him whose retributive justice is sure, though no earthly sword fulfils His mandate."

"You must consider, Mr Wilmott," remarked Napier in a low, stern voice, "that I owe this act to Harry. I am called on to redress his deeply injured honour,—to redress family disgrace, to say nothing of my own outraged feelings as a man and a brother."

"If opinion is to be satisfied by your breaking those laws which ensure it the exercise of honest judgment, seek to sever the *good* of its fiat from the *error* which jarring interests and evil examples create. Public opinion is governed by two influ-

ences, good and ill. Evil influence legalizes wrong, by placing it on a par with right; but the good influence, the guardian of social virtue, and true light of its honour, inspires an honest man's heart with an earnest zeal to pursue an even, consistent path. I know that men who are guided by the evil dogmas of *the school*, that advocates the principles of duelling, will readily quote the word 'honour,' and hug themselves in the belief that, because they are recognised as 'honourable men,' they must parade the fact in the eyes of society; but what is this but an arrogant and wicked feeling, standing in sad contradistinction to that lasting principle which enjoins that our conduct must be just to ensure us peace of mind." Mr Wilmott here placed his hand with affectionate familiarity on Napier's shoulder, and, turning to Langton, said further:—"Now, you must speak to him, Mr Langton. You are of the world, and with the experience of an honourable man, say is not duelling founded on a false principle, an 'ignis fatuus,' not merely a bubble, but a snare."

"I acknowledge the justice and propriety of your argument," answered Mr Langton, with the expression of severe thought on his countenance.

“Napier, did you know all”—he checked himself and said, with slight confusion of manner, “Napier, if you had had opportunities of observing, as I have, how lamentably right has been overridden through an injured party having recourse to the pistol for redress, you would see that it is a false agent indeed. There are laws to protect innocence ; to them this man Wilton must, ere long, be consigned. Therefore, instead of throwing away valuable time, or acting in a manner that may place you ‘hors de combat’ for further usefulness, let us join heart and hand to pierce the mystery which hangs over your brother’s fate ; and to succeed in this we must dive as far as possible into the nature of his connexion with Wilton ; and research, inquiry, and resolution, not violence, must be the means by which we must hope to succeed in this undertaking.”

Napier was conquered ; common sense made passion look very like a silly wayward thing. Wisely had Mr Wilmott removed the veil from Napier’s eyes. Napier’s sympathies were appealed to. Scarcely had Mr Wilmott spoken before he thought of how deep his reverend friend’s concern must

have been to have compelled him to step from his habitual retirement, and to appear before him in the light in which he stood. He evinced no displeasure, but with the candour of an honest heart he confessed his fault openly, and without disguise. "You have cured me of my folly," he said, bending his head in deference to his old friend: "indignation had so biassed my reason that I considered the fulfilment of my determination necessary to protect my honour. I acknowledge I fell into an error, and now declare, that though I am resolved to redress the evident injury inflicted on our name, I will advance my purpose solely through the channel the law opens."

"This is well," whispered Dr Powell to Mr Langton; "you have done nobly and wisely, and no compliment. *Your second successful labour,*" he added significantly; "it is an easier task to conquer many enemies than to gain a victory as you have done over yourself. Obey the dictates of your present feelings, and I believe all will go well; but keep a keen eye on Napier. I know him well; he is rash and headstrong when his warm heart is touched." Dr Powell rubbed his hands;

he was at ease. "Ay, ay," he added, "we have defrauded Wilton of his desire; nothing would rejoice him more, particularly in his present mood, eh, Langton, than a message from Napier."

Napier interrupted him by saying, "Pray explain the matter to me to which Langton alluded. Did Pearson act as Blake informed me,—that is, inflict a public disgrace on that man Wilton this morning?"

"What did Blake say about it? he is apt to embellish, you know," asked Dr Powell, whilst Langton busied himself in scanning a paper before him.

Napier repeated the substance of the landlord's information.

"He was correct in the main," answered Dr Powell; "our Vallis friend, Pearson, committed an error, for which I am disposed, however, to pardon him. I do not exactly understand the motive of his conduct; but it seems our singular and erratic friend had cause of quarrel with Wilton; and as he is not a man to stand upon ceremony, he flung himself in Wilton's way, and requested an interview at Henley by the copse side

at four o'clock. Wilton used some insulting remarks, calling him a wandering vagabond, and I believe had the temerity to raise his cane to strike him, upon which Pearson acted exactly as you have been informed. He was taken into custody, and released from his unpleasant position sooner than he expected; he has, however, assented to my views, that it would be wise to make himself scarce of S — for some time."

"I am a great deal puzzled in regard to that individual's conduct," said Napier, thoughtfully. "In some way he seems connected with every circumstance that affects us, yet keeps in the background with singular taciturnity. I have only seen him twice, and then could make nothing of him. Have you fallen across his path, Langton?" But the latter had left the room unnoticed by Napier. Dr Powell took up the word, saying:—

"Yes, Langton has met him; still I must say that Langton is a good deal perplexed about him. During your illness he went to Willis's to see him; he found him moody and abstracted, and told me that he had learnt he would sit six days evidently

labouring under vast mental depression, and then again take himself off to the field, and devote himself to his sports with singular perseverance. Langton does not believe that sporting is his sole motive for being in this neighbourhood."

"I agree with him there, and I own his conduct is excessively enigmatical," said Napier. "I had some chat with Willis this morning, and he says that he appeared before him last March, and, after a time, solicited the use of a room at the farm, for which he tendered liberal payment. An agreement was entered into, and in a little while the family looked upon him as one of themselves. At first he was seldom absent at night, or for a whole day; but lately it has been different,—sometimes a week or more and he would not appear, and then he would return when least expected. He still retains his apartments, pays cheerfully, makes handsome presents to the children, and makes himself when there quite at home. One thing which surprises Willis is, that from the first, although he was in the thick of good fishing, he often returned with an empty basket; and now, although there are more than a usual sprinkling of birds, his

dogs first-rate, and his shooting the theme of universal wonder amongst the keepers, he has come back of a night, after many hours' absence, with a mere brace or so, which he might have killed on the common path. Of course amongst them there are many conjectures about him; the last rumour is that he is some nobleman in disguise come down to win his way to Mary's affections, or Miss Neville's, they cannot tell which; little Annie Willis declares it must be Miss Napier, because he has painted a beautiful picture of her, which he often sits looking at."

CHAPTER II.

I MUST now ask my readers to accompany me to that world within our rock-bound isle ycleped London, and take them at once to a commodious residence in Cavendish Square. The inmates of this house consisted of two ladies. In a drawing-room, at a small distance from a cheerful fire, sat the individuals to whom I have alluded. One was reclining in a comfortable sofa-chair, deeply occupied, it would seem, with her own thoughts; whilst the other was busy with a piece of fantastic embroidery, enlivening the matter-of-fact nature of her labour by fanciful exercise of a full, soft, tutored voice, in a language which the musical genius of the fair daughters of Italy have converted into a means of

conquest, gain, and triumph. There was a vast difference in the age and appearance of the two ladies. One was now verging on fifty-five years; the features of her face were pale, thin, and shrunken, —still severely handsome, though without a trace of genial sympathy or sensibility in the expression. The eye emitted a dark brooding light, and its gaze was significant of latent fire and passion. The dress of this person seemed to correspond with the flowing drapery of the Italian costume, save that it was not so complete in its finish as with the lady who occupied a light ottoman opposite to her. In every respect were these ladies dissimilar, though connected by the closest tie of relationship. The lady occupied with the embroidery was indeed a young and graceful being. As she leant over her framework, she presented a specimen of female loveliness seldom seen, even in a country where beauty is proverbial. Her age could not be more than twenty; her form was finely moulded, and faultless in its symmetry. She was elegantly attired; her white dress was made with exquisite taste, and well became the complexion, which was of pure olive. The eye was large and dark, with an intellectual light

beaming from it that riveted attention. A slight black veil, light as the gossamer web, descended to the waist from her raven black tresses. Such were the inmates of the house in Cavendish Square.—Youth, with innocence and beauty,—age, with the fires within of a burning conscience. A mother trembling lest a chance should reveal her character, yet periling life and prosperity to pursue the dark purposes of revenge.

After a time the elder lady interrupted the younger, saying,—

“Cease, Livia, I pray; I would hold some talk with you.”

The young lady immediately looked up from her task; the soft notes were hushed, still a sweet smile played on her lips as she said:—

“I am glad, dear mother, I have roused you from your taciturnity; if you are inclined for conversation, I will torment you with a thousand questions.”

“What would you ask?” the mother asked; and before she received a reply, she said shortly: “Speak in our own tongue;—I hate English from my inmost soul.”

The daughter's bright smile vanished from her lips, and, with a pained expression of countenance, she answered :—

“ I love Italian for its sake, and yours, dear mother ; but I cannot hate English, for it has instructed me in much that I feel must be of benefit.”

“ How mean you ?” questioned the elder lady somewhat sharply.

“ To think rightly, I hope ; and it has taught me a child's duty and obedience, mother,” answered the young lady in a low plaintive voice.

The mother muttered something,—not a maternal benediction, I fear, but made no distinct reply ; presently, however, she said :—

“ Louis tarries long ; he wrote he would be here by five o'clock : it now verges upon seven. Livia, he is a stern, resolute man ; beware how you thwart him, child.”

“ His authority shall have weight with me, if he does not arm worldly interests against my own convictions. In so great a step as marriage, I have been taught to consider that the heart's foresight and capacity should have some influence. Self-interest surely has a right to speak when the happi-

ness and peace of a lifetime are menaced," was the answer.

"More of your English education," echoed the mother in a harsh voice. "Well, it is Louis's work, and he must answer for it. In my day and in my country a parent's will was deemed law;" and no very pleasant glance attended this false sentiment.

"But does such an authority give happiness to the child, mother—heartfelt satisfaction, and wedded joy?" asked the young lady.

A smile of disdain curled the thin lip of the elder lady as she replied:—

"It gives her a lover for a season, and a roving license afterwards, child, if her tastes are erratic."

"Do not speak so, dear mother," cried the daughter reprovingly; but immediately added, in a low, sad voice:—"You are angered, I fear. The happiness of a woman and a wife mainly depend upon her adhering to the rules of morality and propriety; when she loses sight of this principle, her peace is bankrupt."

The mother started, and her dark black eye shot fire. Her lip quivered as she glared on the fair girl opposite her; fortunately the face of the latter was bent over her frame, therefore she did not ob-

serve these symptoms of bitter emotion. . Curbing the dark feeling, she said harshly :—

“ Surely you must have found the happiness you prate about in Mr Neville, a handsome man, a gentleman of large property, and in all points desirable.”

“ Leave out the last words, mother,” was the reply, “ and society would generally agree with you, I suppose ; but on the latter part of your remarks I think a great deal rests. In so great a step as marriage, a woman’s ears, not her eyes, should judge for her. Between Mr Neville and myself,” with a tone of pride she spoke, “ there could be no sympathy ; wedded love, I feel, must be based on esteem, and the virtue which begets esteem is born of a happy conscience.”

“ Well, well,” answered the other pettishly, “ I never meant you to marry Mr Neville ; I only wanted to probe your real feelings. Your brother once indulged in a whim of this kind, but it has died away : I think well it has.”

These words were barely uttered, when the door of the apartment opened, and our old acquaintance Mr Wilton entered the room.

“ Ah, Louis, we have long expected you,” cried

the young lady, springing forward and embracing him.

Mr Wilton stepped to his mother's side, and greeted her in a kind and earnest manner. There was no affectation here; the mother returned the *boy's* affection. The wayward and stern man acknowledged her authority. True, she seldom thwarted him; her time was not come. She seemed to set implicit faith in his ability, and professed to countenance his designs. They had sworn to triumph or fall together. Yet, strange! each had their *secret*. Deceit from the commencement rendered it impossible to reveal *hers*; and thus events seemed to work in such a manner, that it was most likely she would suffer through her own evil schemes, or at least that they would be rendered impotent from the tyranny which her own falsehood exercised over her vicious designs.

The existence of this fair girl in this family I will shortly explain. When Wilton was securely domiciled at Mowbray, his mother returned to her native country. She had fought hard with the world, and consequently acquired a harsh experience; she was not likely to lapse into error, or commit herself

in aught that would damage her position, or enervate the vigour of her vindictive hate of those who had inspired these evil dispositions. Though rejecting pecuniary arrangements, she would not drop the title to which she had claim; she knew, by retaining it, that it would be a passport to consideration and position in society in her country, and her calculation was correct. Her youthful indiscretion was forgotten. The *natural* charity of the Italians to error such as she had committed was freely extended. With a people who hear of nothing but love, and whose women live in an atmosphere of infidelity and dangerous example, she soon basked in smiles and favour, and found arms extended to embrace her. Her beauty had lost the first blush; but still her air, her style, her soft, enchanting voice, her graceful figure, procured her the admiration of her countrymen. The yoke of life seemed a pleasant one; she bore it with grace and ease: she was admirably superficial. Amongst the many offers of marriage which crowded upon her, she selected a person of age and wealth, a man of easy disposition and temper. The Count d'Albani would allow her to follow her own schemes, and indulge her fancies;

it was all she could desire. The girl whom I have introduced into this chapter was the fruit of this union. The Count d'Albani survived the birth of his daughter a few years only ; and then the countess by her *son's* instructions, of whom it can be concluded she had never lost sight, took up her residence in London, and for politic reasons her connexion with the aristocratic relatives of her first husband was concealed.

Wilton was struck with the beauty of his young half-sister, and thought to turn it to a rare account. His sagacity suggested that a flippant continental education would not do to advance his projects : it would fashion an actress, but not perfect the lady. The latter 'twas his ambition the young Livia should be. Strange it was, that the profligate and harsh worldly man should remove the child from the mother's care, and place her at a very early age with English ladies remarkable for their taste, knowledge, and discretion. Before the daughter understood the mother's feelings, or the evil in the mother's heart, her mind was stored with truth, and governed by correct ideas ; and thus the child's disposition, as she grew into a woman, expanded with those

social ties and generous affections which adorn and beautify the female character. If virtue be an indigenous plant in the human mind, it requires great care and much wise culture to bring it to blossom well and sweetly. Wilton had made, for himself, a gross blunder. He judged the minds of others by his own ; so, when he saw that education, well ordered and refined, had brought forth rare and ennobling fruits, he railed at virtue, and thought they had come forth solely to counteract his projects. At the age of eighteen, this young lady became one of the Countess d'Albani's household, not before ; a highly accomplished, elegant, and sweetly dispositioned being. Now Wilton's plans were to be advanced. William Neville was to be brought captive to the fair Livia's feet. The brother could not see the possibility of opposition. Before, however, Wilton's direct authority was brought to bear, a circumstance occurred which rendered him lukewarm on a point on which he had before speculated much and built up hopes. The young lady was allowed to cultivate her dislike of Mr Neville ; indeed to relieve her of his importunity, her mother, by her son's advice, took her to Italy. They so-

journed a year or so in Naples, returning a few weeks prior to this present period to the residence into which we have obtruded. Thus matters were in this household—a violet between the nightshade and the briar.

Livia, at Wilton's solicitation, took her seat at the piano, and reveled in the melody she evidently loved. She acquitted herself with exquisite skill even in the eyes of able and acute critics. The fair girl *felt* the sentiment of the poet; and, moreover, that more impassioned emotion which song itself engenders. As she sang, her pure enthusiasm seemed to gift her with inspiration. The varying flush upon her cheek, the eloquent language of the eye, evinced that her soul vibrated at the thrill which intimates that the senses recognise the ideal beauty of the art with which she held so rapt a converse.

The Countess d'Albani muttered, with quivering lip, to her son, whilst Livia was yet singing,—“Look on her, and see the personation of what your mother was!—was before pride, treachery, and injustice raised up envy, and discord, and the fires of vengeance within.—Cruel, cruel fate!”

"'Tis a sweet picture to contemplate," answered Wilton, with his eye upon the performer: "destiny will be pitiless if her star light her not to happiness!" And, avoiding further remark from his mother, he took a seat by his sister's side, and seemed to gaze with interest upon her; and as the last note died away, he congratulated her on the simplicity and delicacy of her execution.

"You *feel* music, dear girl!" he said,—"*English* air has not benumbed the celestial gift bestowed upon you by your mother-land." Then, turning over the leaves of the English ballad she had last sung, he observed, in a bitter tone, "Fair sentiment and hopeful!—'Tis sad the wisdom of the world should give the poet's words the lie."

"I have been taught, Louis," answered Livia, gravely, "that the world's true wisdom is chartered on the integrity of mankind. If the world's children live for low ends, and are governed by petty, selfish interests, the legacy bequeathed cannot be wisdom.—Think you that it is?—Indeed, is not the wisdom of the world, as an ennobling principle, as yet undemonstrated?"—And, ere he could reply, she pressed a light kiss upon his forehead;

and then bidding her mother good-night, glided from the room.

Wilton returned to his mother's side by the fire, thoughtful, if not sullen. The latter had not spoken for some time ; she had watched both, and listened and felt a morose kind of satisfaction in hearing Livia contend with Wilton ; but the emotion arose not from pride of the daughter's principles, but in having it in her power to say, " Had you followed my advice, we should have had a companion, not a mentor in her." But it must not be supposed that the scheming mother wished ill to her daughter, or that she would really have stripped her of a virtue she possessed ; far from it. *Next* to her son's success, her own evil ambition in effecting the ruin of the Nevilles, her girl's welfare was her thought ; and she rested on Wilton to advance her projects, for wealth and high station was her aim for Livia.

The Countess d'Albani was the first to break the silence which had ensued on her daughter's departure.

" Louis," she said in a low nervous voice, " it is long since we have met. How does your work advance?—Will my vow be accomplished?"

Wilton's head was quickly raised, and a frown was on his brow as he replied, "It shall—it shall!—Each day adds fuel to the fire of my resolution. Fortune frowns; but I must succeed. Ellen hates me—nevertheless she shall be mine!—My authority over Neville will level their pride, and bring them to my feet! I have not told you whence comes my power; but, believe me, it is potent; it shall bring the old man to entreat an alliance with us, and the proud beauty that scorns me now shall soften towards me, though she be unsought by me. I could tell you much; but you are nervous, and give way to apprehensions and fears; therefore be satisfied with my assurance, that I have entangled the heir of Mowbray in a net from which he cannot escape."

"Do you love that girl?" was asked in a low uneven voice,—“Have you experienced aught of the rapture and agony of real passion?—Have you been weak enough to allow her beauty to exercise an unsafe authority?—Would her loss be an irreparable misfortune?”

Wilton laughed hoarsely. “Mother, I am hardly English enough to prate of delicate devotion. A little while, and I shall ask for your congratulations.”

His companion trembled ; her mind was evidently much perturbed.

“ It is well ! but beware lest the arch fall in at the moment you attach the key-stone. How do you stand with the upstarts of Vallis ?—Has the heir returned—and has he cancelled his bond ?—Money, you know, commands good fortune.”

A vast change came over Wilton’s countenance ; and then he looked hard, and almost fiercely, into his mother’s face, as he cried, “ How do I stand with the upstarts of Vallis ? Mother, seek not to pry into my secrets. What is right for you to know you shall know, and no more ! Be satisfied that I am on the alert. Henry Napier has not returned. His wife has ; she is at Vallis House.”—And he gazed into his mother’s face as if to notice the effect of this communication.

She turned very pale, and answered hoarsely, “ I fear, I fear your cunning has lost its force—something has gone wrong in that quarter. At Naples, I met that man Armstrong ; he was bold and presuming ; he uttered dark hints ; to Livina he was——”

“ Ha ! ” interrupted Wilton, fiercely,—“ Breathe

it not.....and dared he approach that sweet girl?"—He paused an instant—and then said, as he looked his mother in the face, "Mother, to-night as I gazed into that pure heart, and I saw to its depths, I felt my soul thrill with fear!—What will be her fate?—Our disgrace would be her death!—Has she an idea of our real position?"

"I know not," was answered nervously; "I do not fully understand her. I almost fear her, Louis! She has often questioned me about matters I would hold secret. I have as yet been enabled to blind her; but can I always succeed?"

"You must," he said more calmly,—“deception in a good cause is excusable. We must not cloud her young life if we can avoid it. I cannot triumph yet, mother,” he continued, as he rose to withdraw. “If I am indifferent to my own reputation, I shall forfeit opinion when I require it to give weight and vigour to my charge. I must impose on society a little longer, then all will go well. In six months I will be owner of my father’s home; and then—and then I will start afresh in life, and on a path that shall lead to prosperity and repute.”

CHAPTER III.

MR LANGTON now fulfilled his promise to visit his friends at Vallis ; and, about the same time, Sir Thomas Ashtonby (Napier's college acquaintance) seemed to find an attraction in the household. From what was seen of the latter individual at Oxford, it will be concluded that he was a gay, light-hearted, madcap sort of person—with a character indeed over which medley presided—generous to folly—hasty, overbearing, and quick to take offence—one of society's favoured, spoiled children. Born heir to a good estate, indulged and petted from infancy, it cannot be wondered at that, now he had reached the age of manhood, he should estimate himself at his own valuation, and consider himself,

from an almost pardonable vanity, a fine specimen of his class, and a really good fellow. On a former visit at Vallis House, Sir Thomas had conceived a sudden and violent attachment for Mary Napier ; at least, he believed in the fancy ; and not supposing for a moment that his advances would meet with opposition, he proceeded, over-confidently, to pursue the work he had allotted to himself. He was not exactly the person, however, to gain much influence over the heart of a girl so delicately nurtured as Mary Napier. When she was no longer deceived as to his views, it required small self-examination to show her there could be no bond of sympathy between them ; and as she was not one of those airy, frivolous beings, who think it diverting to lure an admirer on, to give importance in the eyes of others to their little charms, and to please their vanity, she sought, in as firm yet delicate a manner as possible, to discourage the familiar tone of his address.

Now Mr Langton was at Vallis ; he was of course a great deal occupied with Napier ; yet, not so much so but that a portion of his time was given up to the ladies of the family. He

was not so much at his ease at Vallis as he had been at Mowbray; he strove hard for composure, but the labour was often futile. None but admitted his influence; and Napier was quite prepared to submit to his extended experience in their joint search for his brother: still, though Langton must have been gratified that such marked trust and confidence were reposed in him, he was subject to much inequality of feeling. At times his manner was cold and reserved, tinctured with bitterness,—and again there were moments when his fine intellectual countenance would light up, as if the heart expanded in the fulness of some enjoyment experienced in the soul within. At these latter periods his voice was pitched to a tender and earnest key, which conveyed an inexplicable sense of comfort to those whose anxieties evidently interested him in no common degree. He had had an early interview with the Lady Inez; none but themselves learnt its import; it was of course concluded, from the fair invalid's excited, and somewhat strange manner, that it had arisen from listening to this true friend of her noble brother, as he recounted his knowledge of that brother's hopes for her, and his deep affection.

There was, too, business to conduct, at least such was the reason given for the many hours Langton spent in the boudoir of Inez. She gave no explanation of these interviews. Standing in the position which Langton did, as sole executor of Walter Curran, to the Napier family, it was a matter of no surprise that Inez should feel a melancholy gratification in his society, and receive the marked attention which he lavished upon her with undisguised pleasure. Indeed, Langton's influence was vast at Vallis. Generous ideas and disinterested sentiments had won him his position, and over Inez his authority was such, that it appeared to thaw the freezing silence which was gathering over her soul,—the iron gratings of despair were broken through. Their friends noticed with great pleasure so manifest a change for the better; but, of course, they did not seek to pry into the cause of this happy alteration in their much loved relative. Mary Napier dwelt more on the consequences of Langton's presence than the rest. His influence over Inez perplexed her not a little. She was less moved by such evident assurances of true friendship than from the singularity

of the new character with which he seemed suddenly invested. Common sense bade her deal with generalities, but curiosity was aroused; and when has its ambition limited itself to matter of fact conclusions?

Sir Thomas Ashtonby was far from satisfied with Langton's position at Vallis. To him, it appeared that Mary Napier was better pleased in the society of the reserved and guarded stranger than in his. She would always listen with attention to the calm, and even somewhat constrained remarks of Langton, but turn from him with impassive countenance, though he deemed his compliments well-timed. How was this? And his unsettled habit of thinking and acting deterred him from arriving at a sound conclusion. The fact was, he was younger in good sense than the gay baronet of twenty-four would believe,—and more of a coxcomb in female society than his education and position, socially speaking, countenanced; and, therefore, was deluded enough to fancy that man, in his intercourse with the other sex, if he wanted to gain favour, had only to flatter their self-love; that sentiment was another term for passion; flattery the sure road to success; and plumed himself

on erudition meet as he would quote poor, disappointed, querulous 'Pope' as his authority. But Mary Napier's was not the heart from which Pope, presuming he was justified in his ungallant censure, obtained his text. There was the rich blush of high, pure pride in her young mind, and it prompted the belief that woman was man's equal in a moral point of view; and that she was very little inferior in judgment, consistency, and ability, in spite of the learned saws of Socrates, or the pompous philosophy of a later school.

Between the two visitors there was small sympathy. No question but Ashtonby regarded Mr Langton in the light of a dangerous rival, and would scruple little in fixing a quarrel on him, on ever so light a pretext. More than once Langton had been sorely tried by Ashtonby's supercilious remarks, or rather ill-disguised sneers. Still, it was evident that Ashtonby was on his guard; as Langton, divining his purpose, met him with so firm and manly a deportment, that the would-be aggressor was confounded. As time wore on, it was evident to Ashtonby that his dream of love would end in disappointment; and arriving at this con-

clusion, his conduct was almost unbearable. His aversion to Langton was too open to admit of question, and like a rash foolish person, he endeavoured to involve his companion in difficulty; but in laying a trap to ensnare Langton, he brought a considerable amount of mortification on himself.

He had been vexed and irritated in the morning at a stern but gentlemanlike rebuke received from his self-created foe; and leaving the house, had ridden away across the country to gallop off his annoyance, mayhap. Langton and Napier had gone in a different direction on some private business, and on their return encountered Ashtonby in Vallis Park. Some hurdles stood sturdily in their path to the stables. Napier called to a groom to open a catch-gate, when Ashtonby turned to Langton, and said, "Have you a mind to try your nag? Napoleon, in Wilton's hands, was a clever fencer; the ground is soft, if you get a spill." It was an awkward leap he pointed at; for, unlike the common hurdle in general use, there were iron ones standing, at least four feet in height. Langton's cheek crimsoned. He answered, rather tartly, unperceiving Lady Napier and Mary near, "Will-

ingly will I see what Napoleon can do." And gathering his nag together, he took the leap, in an easy canter, with a clear stretch of some seven or ten feet. Ashtonby was by his side. Langton looked annoyed, if not angry. Turning sharply in his saddle, he said to the man who had run up at Napier's call, "Take one of those small hurdles (nearly two feet in height), place it on the top of the standing ones, tie it firmly, and then another in a line with it.....Yes, that will do," and muttering to himself, "I will put a stop to this schoolboy nonsense, by teaching you a lesson, young sir," he turned to Ashtonby, who stood wondering what was to come; and remarked, with a dash of *hauteur* quite unusual to him, "I am accustomed to *lead*, not *follow*; excuse me if I show you the way;" and wheeling his hunter round, he placed about forty or fifty yards between him and the double hurdle, then shook the noble animal he bestrode with energy, and roused him with the spur.

The generous steed nobly responded to his rider's nervous call,—cleared the truly formidable leap in masterly style, and dashed onward before Langton could check him, over a second fence, which was no

great distance from the former. Ashtonby, with all due honour to his manhood, was not slow in his attempt to follow, but he and his horse were young at such feats,—he had not, as his opponent had often done, taken first spear, the stroke of honour, from the hardest riders in India, when ground more formidable and leaps more hazardous have to be crossed, than home Englishmen wot of,—and the latter swerved, nor did he seem disposed to face the trial again. The horse had been hustled and bullied during the morning's ride, and had, as even bipeds will do when so treated, allowed temper to get the better of him. A bitter oath escaped Ashtonby, as whip and spur were harshly used. "In mercy spare the poor horse, Sir Thomas; he fears the formidable leap. Mr Langton, tell him it is beyond the animal's power," cried Mary Napier, who, with her mother, had been attracted to the spot by so unusual an equestrian performance. Ashtonby only heard the last words. "We will see to that," he answered, and lifting the horse with impetuous energy, he literally flung him across the barrier; there was a plunge and a smash; and the rash young baronet lay on his back, some six feet be-

yond—he rose with difficulty, sullen and discomfited.

“You are taking unusual exercise this morning,” said Lady Napier, gravely; “have you, gentlemen, an ambition for broken bones? You seem bent on effecting such a casualty.”

Langton answered, “Sir Thomas Ashtonby *courteously* invited the trial. And——”

“And you felt bound to follow him,” interrupted Lady Napier; “so I suppose you would have responded to a proposal to jump off Roland’s Cliff; as danger seems the lure.”

“Exactly so, madam,” cried Sir Thomas Ashtonby; “it *is* an Englishman’s weakness. Mr Langton, I owe you my thanks for the lesson you have taught me.” And passing close by him, he said in a low voice, “Courtesy should always accompany candour, what say you to Roland’s Cliff?”

“If I meet you there, I’ll fling you over it,” answered Langton, unable to keep from laughing, even in his vexation.

Lady Napier remarked to her daughter that she would pursue her walk alone, as she knew the latter was anxious to return to Inez. Langton

tendered his escort, which Lady Napier accepted, when Mary observed to Sir Thomas Ashtonby,—

“As Charles is gone to see after your horse, and as, I presume, you are anxious to get rid of these evidences of discomfiture,” glancing at his soiled dress, “I will take you a near by-path to the house.” He assented, and followed her steps, flattered by this slight mark of favour. He was altogether wrong. The sensitive girl thought she had offended his pride by speaking of his cruelty to his horse, and touched his dignity by laughing at his soiled dress; so, in a kind, conciliatory tone, she chatted away to relieve him of restraint and dispel his chagrin. He considered her conduct significant of interest,—he would strike a blow, lose all or win, and before Mary knew what was passing, he had assured her of his warm attachment, pronouncing her christian name rather audibly, more than once. Mary’s first impulse was to turn and follow her mother’s steps, but with a minute’s thought she decided, it would be better to let him know her mind at once; and fully, therefore, she said very seriously,—

“Sir Thomas Ashtonby, I must beg you to

listen to me. You have spoken *candidly*, you say, and I will as candidly answer you. You have altogether mistaken my feelings towards you. You have addressed me in a tone which intimates, you believe I shall respond to the sentiments which animate you. You are wrong; were it otherwise, in our present sad position, I should feel it treason to my kindred to yield to so selfish an emotion; but, as it is, I must tell you now, and for ever, that I can esteem you only as my brother's friend."

There was no reason to doubt Mary Napier's sincerity,—her face was grave and pale; there was not even the usual timidity displayed on such occasions by girls of her age and delicacy of feeling; her demeanour evinced, that she had performed a disagreeable though necessary duty. Her companion walked by her side, but said not a word. Mary hardly knew how to read his silence; at last she said: "I am innocent of a thought that could give you pain or offence. You must acknowledge you have forced this explanation from me; but now that we understand each other, may we not be friends?" and she extended her hand with a cordial smile. He had recovered his self-possession;

he took the hand offered him, and bent over it formally ; he would have been generous, but his pride was wounded to the quick, so he bitterly observed :—

“ You have acted with your usual discretion ; pardon me for my great error ; you shall be troubled no more by my presumption ;” and he took another path to the house.

“ That fellow Langton is the cause of this, in spite of her fancy about home troubles,” he muttered, as he strode along cutting at the twigs right and left with his whip. “ And the rebuke, too—who could have thought that soft face could wear so decided an expression. By Heaven, I never was so humbled. But I will punish that cold, sneering fellow,” he continued, resolving, it would seem, to visit his disappointment on Mr Langton. “ But how ? he is as impervious to insult as a flint to feeling ; but I will be avenged.” His thoughts seemed to take another turn. “ I shall gain nothing by that,” he cried. “ Yesterday, ay, confound his skill, after I had made a capital shot, hitting the mark in the centre as I did, and saying with meaning enough—‘ Well put ; I should have had *you*

there, Langton, eh?' I recollect, now, the smile and sarcasm, as he said: 'Ashtonby, conceive that painted board a tiger-cat suddenly bounding upon you, would you have fired that shot so cleverly? I have done so, and brought such monsters to my feet,—they, you know, are almost as savage and wilful as some men of our acquaintance, only the wild animal has the advantage, *it* does not affect good-breeding. Pshaw! a village tailor would beat you at this play, if the pastime was common with men of his profession.' Every way he foils me. Wilton was right, he won't fight! and Napier favours him; yet Napier is a good fellow; how *can* he fancy that humbug's superciliousness? Well, I'll be off to S——, and explain another day—I wouldn't dine in *his* company for a thousand;" and, without a moment's reflection, he entered the house, wrote two notes, one to Lady Napier, and the other to Charles, pleading that intelligence of a particular nature required his presence in London.

In an hour he was at S——, plotting with Wilton how to unmask Langton, and expose him as the impostor Wilton declared him to be, as there was no such name on the East India civil or

military list as Langton. In his present state of mind, it was a grand discovery for Ashtonby, and Wilton thought, it would be well to sow seeds of suspicion in Napier's mind in regard to Langton; and as he found the young baronet ripe for mischief, he saw he could not do better than use him for his tool.

Little or no allusion was made by the party at Vallis in reference to Sir Thomas Ashtonby's sudden departure. The truth was, he was no great favourite; he presumed upon his wealth and title, often parading the one in the shape of offering heavy wagers, and other fashionable follies; and of the other he was evidently somewhat proud, as he spoke literally of "Conceive an English baronet doing this," &c. &c.; and this assumption was carried to superciliousness in the society of Langton, Dr Powell (who was a good deal at Vallis), and even of Mr Wilmott. From one so giddy and vain as Ashtonby, this assumption was offensive. A *claim* of superiority is irritating and wearisome, even though we are aware that he who exacts it surpasses us in natural qualities and attainments. No doubt some respect is due, and will be paid to

these mental traits, and the feeling will be increased when high birth embellishes them ; but a constant assumption of importance, in those who have nothing but *the* accident of birth to recommend them, is sure to meet with contempt, when the open display of that sentiment is not restrained by interested motives. The knowledge of being one of an ancient and noble house, and the deference and respect that are willingly accorded to him who enjoys this honour and advantage, preclude petty jealousies and social anxieties from exercising their unamiable authority over him, and, as a rule, his bearing is marked by natural courtesy and gentlemanlike urbanity ; but the newly created title—Sir Thomas Ashtonby's patent of nobility bore a very recent date—excites the man of vain mind to exhibit contemptuous or supercilious airs towards another, whom he thinks must be his inferior, and from whom he is jealous of a want of respect, because of his late equality with him.

A rational and pleasant hour had passed since Lady Napier's return with Ellen from the Vale, when conversation was interrupted by Napier's man delivering a note to him. He perused it care-

fully, and his manner evinced surprise and annoyance, followed by a grave and serious air, as he beckoned Langton forth to the balcony, and then placed the communication before him. It was scanned with seeming unconcern, the only emotion visible might arise from a slight contraction of the brow, as he said :—

“Pity one, we esteemed a man of honour, should lend himself to the schemes of a rogue. This is Wilton’s work ; I saw him at S—— yesterday. This note is directed thence. Ashtonby must have gone over there after his somewhat unlooked-for departure this morning ;” and the speaker’s eye was fixed somewhat significantly on his friend.

Napier appeared, as he was, hurt and perplexed ; he asked the question of himself : “What could be Ashtonby’s reason for bidding him to be on his guard in his intercourse with Langton ? Was Mr Langton what he professed to be ?” Such were the questions,—“Bid him state if he served on the civil or military staff in India ? What did these insinuations imply ?” The letter concluded : “My apologies are due for my abrupt departure—with

the suspicions I have harboured, and which I now feel almost confirmed, it was impossible I could remain, and be thrown into hourly intercourse with a person whom I believe unable to support the qualifications which have insured him, to the present time, the trust and confidence of yourself and friends; when he has proved himself to be the character he represents, I will acknowledge my error." Langton perceived Napier's embarrassment, and his countenance expressed regret and sympathy, rather than pride or anger. Leaning over Napier's shoulder, he pointed to the latter paragraph, and feeling the necessity of relieving his friend's mind of doubt and suspicion, if he entertained either, he said:—

"I never asserted that I was attached to the civil or military service of India; but in this paragraph which alludes to the cause of Ashtonby's departure, I fear he perverts the truth. Seek Miss Napier; place this letter in her hands—my request need not be mentioned—and ask her opinion of his assertion. To gratify me you will do this." Langton pleaded, seeing Napier hesitating,—“I should be sorry to entertain a suspicion of ungentlemanly

conduct on the part of one I rather like, in spite of his wayward disposition and self-sufficiency."

"For *your* satisfaction, I will do as you wish," Napier said; and returning to the house, he took his sister aside, and gave her the letter. After a lapse of some five minutes, he returned to Langton, and frankly observed:—

"You were a true prophet; a few words explained the whole. Ashtonby honoured my sister this morning by proposals of marriage, and she was so ungrateful as to subject him to the mortification of a refusal. In his ill-temper, he has flown at you, because, I presume, you were the cause of his appearing so ridiculous at the leaping feat. However that may be, his conduct towards you has been unfair and unmanly."

Langton did not appear very well at ease at Napier's allusion to the proposal of Ashtonby to the lady, for his brow contracted; but he passed off a sharp emotion with a smile of irony, observing only,—“He is but an indifferent fowler who is caught in his own springe.” He then continued: “This silly matter has almost driven affairs of more consequence out of my head. I had been, for reasons

I will explain another day, in communication with a trusty agent in Paris, and it struck me, that I might possibly, from inquiries at Wilton's hotel there, ascertain whether, during the past winter, there had been a person in attendance on or in connexion with Wilton, at all likely to tally with the description the Lady Inez had given of him who had acted as his tool. The reply I received was, that an individual, calling himself Monsieur or Captain de Morney, had been living with Wilton more as a dependent than friend; and that, in spite of his mustachios and name, he was unquestionably an Englishman. His exact appearance was given, and, on comparing notes, I am satisfied that Monsieur de Morney and the jailor of the Lady Inez were one. Be this as it may, we are surrounded by craft and cunning, and must work with skilful tools. We must seek out this De Morney; he knows more about matters, in reference to your brother, than we do. He asserted, you know, *'that he had Wilton under his foot,'* and that not on account of the Lady Inez: there is in this, perhaps, more than a vain boast."

"Entirely," answered Napier; "and we will be

off to Paris next week, and track this De Morney."

A servant approached Mary Napier at this moment, evincing considerable uneasiness. Mary inquired the reason of the servant's agitation, when a few whispered words caused her to start and tremble; and then she moved towards the drawing-room. Pausing at the door-sill, she was joined by Ellen Neville, who, passing her arm round her friend's waist, anxiously inquired the reason of her distress. Mary did not speak, but pointed onward, and they entered the room. Ellen's fortitude, too, was greatly tried. A fainting form was stretched upon the sofa, and as Lady Napier turned to notice the comers, the pale misery-stricken countenance of the once loved Fanny Churchill met their view.

CHAPTER IV.

POOR Fanny was indeed a sad spectacle,—cowering, dejected, care-worn : few would have recognised in her present state the once blithe, mirth-inspiring beauty of Vallis Way. Ellen and Mary were greatly distressed as they gazed upon their once light-hearted and happy little favourite. Sorrows there are which seal the lip of sympathy ; for a time they could only fix a tearful, troubled eye upon the face of the orphan. Ellen Neville was the first to break the sad silence ; still her remarks made small impression.

“ My mother ! ” were Fanny’s first words, in a low, terrified voice. “ They told me at the cottage I should hear of her here ; but Charlotte could not

answer me. Oh ! can it be that she is dead ! if so, God pardon me, for I have destroyed her !” She saw her worst fears were realized ; no one refuted her supposition : her heart was prostrate.

“ And is it come to this ?” she said, in tones of bitter woe. “ My hopes, my prayers,—all vain. I have lost the tenderness, the protecting love of a mother, who died, too, believing me a lost and guilty being.”

“ Oh ! no, no,” cried Ellen Neville, with difficulty and fear ; for sad suspicions were at war with feminine sympathy.

“ She knew you must have been wickedly treated, that you mourned in a cruel captivity the separation from her ; for you were ever her sweet self-denying daughter, Fanny. Your mother’s last breath was spent in prayer for you, linked with tender and dear words of a mother’s love. Fanny, be comforted ; you have a home in all our hearts.”

“ Love from *you*, love for the lorn girl blasted in name and character !” replied Fanny, bitterly. “ Know you what I am, what I have become ?” and she buried her face in her hands, and wept hysterically. She then, with an imploring coun-

tenance, entreated to be left with Lady Napier for a time, as she could not rest or think, until she had revealed facts which would partly redeem her from present suspicions that must attach themselves to her. Her wish was at once complied with, and she was alone with her who had ever been a true and earnest friend.

"Oh! Lady Napier," observed Fanny, very nervously, "I am not indeed the abject creature I must appear in your eyes. You must hear all, and then I am sure you will pity me. Most cruelly have I been treated; deep art and treachery went hand in hand to complete my ruin. I have only lately escaped from one who cared for no law, social or moral—one who is ruled only by wicked misdirected passions."

Lady Napier, with a grave and thoughtful countenance, said she thought Fanny had better defer the subject to another time, as she did not seem equal to her task.

"I am—I must be," she cried eagerly. "I cannot rest an hour in this house, unless you allow me to reveal the history of the past three months. I have dragged my weary limbs hither to exculpate

myself in my mother's eyes. She is gone ; but her sorrows are chronicled here, and here I will pour forth my tale, as if I was really kneeling at her feet."

After a pause, she said as collectedly as she could, poor girl, " You have learnt the strange nature of my disappearance from Mr Napier, who made a daring attempt to rescue me ; therefore you are aware it was contrary to act or wish of my own that I was torn from home and friends. After I had been borne on for some considerable distance, I was led through a wood to a small residence in a dell, sheltered from observation by overhanging rocks and trees. A creature of *his* was my jailor ; and though at first I was treated with consideration, I could not move without subjecting myself to suspicion, and consequently to annoyance. *He* left me ; for two days he remained away, calculating, I suppose, that my grief would be poignant, which would little dispose me to listen to aught he could urge in extenuation of the outrage he had committed. *He* came at last ; he pleaded long and eloquently ;" and Fanny's blush and downcast eyes proved that the remembrance of him still deeply affected her.

She then proceeded to state, that on his first visit

she had promised to pardon the outrage he had committed if he would restore her to her friends. "With well feigned regret he told me my return was out of the question, as I should be compelled to reveal the names of the parties who were implicated in the transaction; he should then be consigned to jail, and his family irredeemably disgraced. You know me sufficiently, dear lady, to be conscious that I am naturally unsuspecting and confiding. *He* worked upon my feelings with deep art, appealing more to my generosity than my affection; for he knew that he had ensnared the latter. I believed him honest in his professions. He treated me with deference and respect,—supplied me with books and matter for employment, and gave me such information from time to time in reference to my mother that I was induced to believe her uneasiness was greatly allayed concerning me.

Still I was far from satisfied with my position. I pleaded again and again to be allowed to return home; I offered to bind myself by solemn oath to conceal all that had passed, to blind the world in regard to those who had perpetrated the outrage upon me, if he would release me from

my cruel captivity. He then sat by me, and for the first time since my incarceration, spake in those tones and with that sentiment to which my heart had bowed months before he pleaded his untiring love. There would be no security against evil and misery to him, unless I consented to wed him privately. I could then return as the wife of one whose station would secure my mother and myself all the comfort and consideration we could desire. I loved him dearly. I doubted the delicacy of the course he urged upon me, but not his honour. I evinced reluctance to accede to his proposals, and he then bade me think of the happiness I should confer upon my mother,—her pride,—her present anxiety; and these sources of influence were urged by words that could win rather than alarm my interest. I solicited a day for reflection, and he left me, stating he would return on the morrow for my decision. I retired to my room, and flinging open the small casement, leant upon the sill for the cool night-air to refresh my fevered brow. The moon had disappeared behind a cloud, and thus the limited scene around was veiled in partial obscurity; still I was soon conscious that the form of a man issued from the thicket. He must have perceived me, for

he approached quickly ; and as I was about to retreat he motioned to me to remain. A courage ruled me which I had never before experienced, and I remained for the stranger to approach me.

“By the aid of the ivy which overspread the wall, he raised himself to a level with my window, saying kindly: ‘Fear me not, Fanny Churchhill, I am your friend.’ I did not fear,—I had heard that voice before, but when I could not then determine ; for, before I could speak, in a low yet almost commanding voice he said: ‘I have laboured hard to trace you out and succour you ; at this moment I am ready to release you from a position fraught with danger and evil to you and your good name. Come with me at once ; my arm is strong, my heart fearless. In a few hours you shall be restored to your friends, and then we will adopt measures which will bring the man who has violated all social laws in the course he has pursued towards you, to justice, and thus clear your good fame of imputation.’ I had listened earnestly ; as his threat fell, I shuddered. I could not, I felt I could not be the means of disgrace and punishment to him who loved me so well. I told the stranger so. I told him such a course would add to my misfortunes ; I would never

fulfil the task which, as his words foreshadowed, would be imposed upon me. 'Rash girl,' he said sternly; 'know you in whom you trust?' and as he spoke the moon lighted the scene, and I perceived my visiter was a tall dark man who had crossed my path some time before when in company with Mr Neville, and had afterwards warned me that I was treading blindfold over dangerous ground. There could be no mistake: all was in unison with the appearance of him who had thrown himself in my way before, and given me a stern though friendly warning of danger. You might have heard of him, dear lady Napier; I mean the individual who lived at Farmer Willis's."

"Mr Pearson," said Lady Napier hastily; "an eccentric but fine-hearted man."

"I once believed him the latter, certainly," answered Fanny sadly; "but I have been rudely undeceived."

Lady Napier testified surprise, observing:—

"Pray proceed; it cannot be that he has acted unworthily."

"You shall judge;" and Fanny went on to say, that Mr Pearson, hearing her decision, had ex-

pressed great annoyance and uneasiness, and had finally asked her what claim she would possess to honourable regard and friendship. Smarting under the reproof, she replied by disclosing to him Mr Neville's intentions ; that he was prepared to make her his wife,—to restore her to her home with a claim which society would respect. He had asked, if it were possible, after the outrage which had been committed, for her still to love the man who made these proposals ; — if her life's happiness was bound up in him,—if she could cleave to him and love him though disgrace and poverty were to fall upon him ; concluding his strange questioning by saying, he had, as he would solemnly declare, but a simple, honourable, and friendly object in putting such things to her. He then said :—

“ I came here to remove you hence ; as things are you had better remain. Hold Mr Neville to his pledge ; give your consent to his proposals : they shall be observed ; fear not, you have a friend by you. I perceive your affections are snared. If you fled from him now and in this guise, your state would be a sad one ; for, in your position, few would deem you innocent. Now re-

member that your happiness, and the success of my labours in your behalf, rest upon your forgetting me. Speak not of me ; allude not to my visit or my promises : take no notice of me, see me wherever or in whatever position I may assume. Observe these injunctions, and much will be done for you,' and he disappeared. The following morning William Neville appeared before her. She consented to a private marriage. They were to repair to Scotland, to a shooting lodge rented by Mr Neville. The journey was commenced, and she had been taken to a house where she found two men waiting their arrival. The ceremony was gone through. Mr Neville had retired for a few minutes, when one of these men approached her, and whispered : ' You are secure.' Beneath the well-assumed disguise she was confident she detected Mr Pearson in the person who addressed her. She had thought a strange reserve had marked the whole proceeding ; but now she was comforted. The party left, and she was alone with her husband. They pursued their journey on the following day, and reached their destination.

As the poor girl reached this point in her trials, she sighed deeply :—

“In deed and in thought I was to him his wife; he kissed away my tears, and for many weeks gave me most satisfactory assurance of affection—no wish was ungratified. Now it was that, with a more hopeful tone, I spake of returning to my mother. I laid out my little plans courageously and confidently, and sought to enlist an interest from him in them. I speculated on the delight of softening my mother’s cares, and built largely in imagination on the pleasure it would yield to her kind heart to see her child, her only one, the wife of a man devoted to her, and whose position in society could not fail to flatter her pride. Time drew on, and on the eve of the day I had fondly hoped to return, I was surprised to find my husband absented himself from home. The morning arrived, but he came not, and as I was about to go forth, thinking I should meet him on his way to me, my passage was impeded, my former jailor again exercised her authority. I was astonished, and assuming on my position, I commanded her to let me pass. She would not, and taunted me. Oh, why should I hesitate,” she said, “her position was as good as mine. When I forced an explan-

ation from her—shame on shame—mine had been a false marriage, the clergyman a cheat, the whole affair a forgery. Conceive my feelings—nay, do not weep, dear lady—the name of wife did not belong to me; my transient happiness had been at the expense of pride and chastity. I lay for days in a torpor, stupefied and prostrate. At last he came; he was upbraiding the woman who had betrayed the infamy of his conduct, when I suddenly stood before him; he shrank from the intensity of my anguish; he fled from me—I was alone—he never came near me after that sad interview; I have not seen him since. My escape was easy. My mother was the incentive; I resolved to confess my first error, in ever having a concealment from her, and then, after explaining how I had been treated, hear if she could still bless her unhappy child. This one desire is frustrated; from you only can I look for protection, if, after having heard me out, you say that you believe me,” and Fanny gazed with trembling earnestness into Lady Napier’s face.

“I believe you implicitly, dear Fanny,” said Lady Napier, very kindly, “and will protect you with a dear friend’s love. You are innocent of

crime; at this moment, it would be out of place to say where you erred. You merit our regard and care. Poor girl! yours is a hard lot; how evil, how very evil William Neville must have become! More vicious than weak, more crafty than intemperate. But, Fanny, I am at a loss to account for Mr Pearson's conduct; I only know him by report; still I am aware he boldly hazarded his life to rescue you on the night you were forcibly borne away from your home."

"Motives are secret; deeds speak plainly," observed Fanny. "How I can have sacrificed the interest Mr Pearson formerly took in me, I know not; why he who has earned a good opinion for having done some good acts, should league himself with the vicious to do evil to a young girl like myself, whose position, in spite of a thousand faults, entitled me to an honourable man's protection, I cannot understand. But this I am sure, that the old gray-headed man who took a prominent part in my undoing, was Mr Pearson and no other, deny it if he can."

"I am perplexed, altogether perplexed," remarked Lady Napier.

Turning to reassure her companion, her eye

rested on the wedding-ring upon the poor girl's finger; Fanny noticed the glance, and a quick flush mantled her cheek as she said:—

"I *cannot* cast it from me; besides, dear lady, it stands as a token of my innocence."

"Such proof is needless," was the reply; and then with virtuous indignation Lady Napier said, "And is this your deed, William Neville? punishment shall overtake you, cold and heartless libertine!"

She was about to withdraw, when a grasp was laid on her hand, and her suffering companion cried:—

"My past is blighted; do not blight the future too. I feel my conduct is wrong, as the world judges; my own heart must support its own trials; but I must still love him, or I must hate myself and him. I cannot, will not, be his accuser; I cannot be the instrument of his punishment."

"Calm yourself, dear Fanny," said Lady Napier, soothingly; "you have innocence to protect you, and that in trial is a dear friend; in a few minutes I will be with you again." And the speaker left the apartment. Passing through the withdrawing-room, she saw Ellen Neville and her

daughter standing in earnest expectation. Joining them, Lady Napier took the arm of the former to lead her to the room where she had left the object of her present solicitude, observing, "Come with me, Ellen; a suffering woman demands our tender care."

"No, no; not yet," cried Ellen, "I must hear all. Indeed I am capable of enduring much—I am sure there is that in poor Fanny's history which touches me closely."

Lady Napier hesitated for a few moments, then, drawing her to a seat, she sketched the affair to her, without concealing aught, or attempting to extenuate William Neville's conduct. As the tale was concluded, Ellen suppressed a sob, rose from her chair without a word, and entered the apartment where Fanny sat. She approached the poor girl with an air which evinced profound emotion and pity. She was not noticed, for Fanny's head was buried in her hands. Ellen stood silently, with a nervous sympathizing heart, and contemplated the sad spectacle. Ay, gaze reverently, Ellen, a holy thing is sorrow; holy that heart-watch over which afflictions rest. Unhappy one! art thou recalling thy fleeting life of happiness, or through

its features recognising an enemy to thy future peace? Gaze reverently, Ellen, for bitter it is for light to be shut out of the woman heart, whilst the germs of love still breathe. Gaze reverently; shed over the orphan's brow the tear of pity; raise with love and tenderness the drooping head, and strive with the voice of affection to mingle a ray of light with the dark shadow of affliction's voiceless thought. And Ellen did so: ere an hour had passed, her tender and consoling interest and gentleness partially extracted the sting from sorrow, and relieved poor Fanny's mind of a portion of its afflicting burden.

CHAPTER V.

“EVERY minute is of importance, Napier,” observed Langton, when he found himself alone with his friend. “You say you will be ready to start for Paris three days hence : it is well. I feel a bitter strife will commence between us and those lawless men ; the sooner we advance the better. I will leave this to-morrow to make my arrangements. I may meet with them at S. ; as yet, there has been no open rupture, although Wilton’s manner proves that he considers me one to be marked rather than trusted. Out on them, lawless villains that they are ; none seem to escape affliction on whom they fix their thoughts. I am all impatience to meet them in an arena in which we shall be un-

trammelled by the adverse interests which beset us in this neighbourhood."

Langton was compelled to put a powerful restraint on his feelings, and when unfitted to support a guarded demeanour, he would suddenly leave his friend and wander forth alone; as if he scorned to adopt a more disingenuous measure to banish the brooding fit into which Napier would be plunged, through his language or conduct. These last few hours, of all that had passed during Langton's brief residence at Vallis, had been the most trying; insinuations had been indulged in at the expense of his probity and integrity, and though he felt they dishonoured him who had indulged in them, and not himself, still should he—now this system of innuendo had commenced—be safe in the opinions of those he so much esteemed, against the craft of knaves, the stratagems of cunning, or the vigilance of envy? True, Mary Napier had vindicated his honour, but he could not tell her how much he valued the confidence she thus placed in him. Yet he was about to leave the roof that sheltered her—leave her neighbourhood, wherein he had sojourned so long,

to enter on a dangerous and perilous mission ; and, again, he had been compelled to withhold from the exemplary Lady Napier his confidence, compelled by the force of circumstances to avoid an explanation of events, which, could he have safely made, would have afforded comfort to those over whose wellbeing he seemed a self-elected guardian. He saw his visit had been premature; there would be an unsatisfying impression left on the minds of the Napiers about him. Thus was he agitated, and the brooding melancholy expression as of yore settled on his countenance; for he did indeed earnestly wish for those, from whom he was about to separate, to remember him with sentiments of pure regard. Thus reflecting, and finding that Napier made no further remark, Langton stepped from the bay-window of the library to the lawn, and wandered onward until he reached the Vale.

“ Shall I break the fetter which constrains me,” he muttered, “ which binds up my heart in this coil of taciturnity? Why did I come here? I thought I could steep my senses in indifference; watch, and observe, guard my heart from the influence of your sweet graces, Mary! How vain the

idea! She is free! but what of that? I must still these ideas. Am I growing selfish? Duty must guide me; if I follow the feelings of my heart, all will be undone." Such was the burden of this inexplicable individual's communings: he had climbed to the summit of the rocks on the opposite side of the valley, and then leant against the trunk of an old oak which stood a giant warder of the pass. There he ruminated for a time, and then he turned away to pursue his walk, as if quite unsatisfied with the conclusions to which he was compelled to arrive.

He had not proceeded more than half a dozen paces, when a noise behind him attracted his attention: he cast a glance back and then stopped, evidently less observant of the cause than the consequence. He was now at the opposite side of the tree, against which he had leant for a space. He retraced his steps, and gave at first an inquisitive, then an astonished glance at the rough and gnarled trunk. What could it be that so much absorbed his attention, that caused him so much surprise? It was this. With boyhood fancy, the young Napiers had carved their names, or their

initials rather, on this old oak. Mr Langton had before observed the circumstance ; in fact, for some reason, of which he was alone master, he had added a hieroglyph, which none in the neighbourhood of Vallis were sufficiently intelligent to decipher ; but now, directly beneath his own mystical character, there was an *H. N.* plainly cut, with date long since the period of Henry Napier's absence from Vallis. At the moment Mr Langton stood much bewildered and surprised : the noise which had attracted his attention in the first instance was accounted for by a spaniel dashing from a partial covert to the left of his position, and springing upon him with elaborate demonstrations of affection, and the dog was followed from the copse by an individual who, heated by exercise, and in the enjoyment of rude health, stood a fine specimen of the British yeoman. Langton turned hastily from the spot at which he had been standing, and returned the new comer's respectful salutation by a warm and friendly shake of the hand.

" Well met, Willis," he said ; " I thought of extending my walk to the farm ; are you returning ? if so I will accompany you a part of the way. Is Mr

Pearson at home? has he returned?" The farmer answered in the negative, and Langton walked onward by his side. After some commonplace remarks in reference to the state of the crops, the weather, and so on, Langton said:

"I shall leave this neighbourhood, Willis, within two or three days. I am come to ask you to take charge of my horses for me. Tell Mr Pearson he may use Napoleon if he likes. Is his absence likely to be long?"

"I cannot say," answered the farmer with a constrained air; "he has not been like himself lately. He said he was going away, and would not come back until he could do so in a happier mood. I will tell him what you say about Napoleon; but, good sir, don't put any more questions to me about my lodger. He is an honourable though unfortunate gentleman, and I would sacrifice all I am worth to serve him."

"Well well," replied Langton, "keep your secret, Willis; in a time of need I hope to meet with a friend like you. Remember about Napoleon, and keep him in regular exercise, that he may be ready for work, for I may suddenly return, and have to test his bottom and condition."

On giving the farmer his final instructions at parting, Langton asked him if there had been any stranger hanging about the Valley lately.

"To be sure. I forgot to tell you, sir, that Mr Wilton was only the day afore yesterday within ten yards of the old oak where I met you to-night. I see 'd him myself," was the answer. Langton here parted with his companion, promising to be with him on the morrow.

"This intelligence is of infinite importance," he said with a much relieved countenance; "but for this information, but for my interest in your peregrinations, Mr Wilton, I should have known not what to think,—now I understand you; you would confine us to Vallis doubtless if you could; a clever stratagem." He had reached the tree, and stood scanning the newly cut letters: "Yes, this is recently done; there is a freshness about the work, though there has been a hasty attempt to render it of some weeks' age in appearance, to correspond with the date; clever rogue;" and he still regarded the letters. Then, as if he had come to a decided opinion, he drew forth a clasp knife, obliterated the newly cut letters, observing: "I would not have the Napiers aware of this cruel deed for

worlds. Scheme afresh, Mr Wilton ; your cunning is forereached once more." Then making some fresh marks on the ground of the effaced letters, he muttered : " You are an accomplished individual, Mr Wilton ; and if, as you say, you are acquainted with the Hindoo tongue, digest *that* as you best can."

CHAPTER VI.

"THIS note tells me that Charles Napier leaves to-morrow, Ellen," observed Colonel Neville to his daughter, as he turned nervously in his easy chair in his own room, holding out the missive to her which he had just read ; " he is coming over this morning to pay me a farewell visit."

Ellen's back was turned to her father ; had it been otherwise, he would have seen that his remark caused a good deal of emotion to rise up suddenly to the cheek ; but with a strong effort she controlled her feelings, and said evenly : " I am sure you are not equal to the excitement of conversation ; only within this past week have you experienced relief from your last alarming attack,"

and her manner, 'as she drew near her father, showed how deep her interest in his well-doing was.

"Ellen," answered Colonel Neville in an agitated voice, "Charles Napier and I must meet once more; then it will be over, the old tie, the social compact, for I see a gulf between us which neither can surpass. My poor girl! *you* know what my fears are; you know that they have foundation. Then can I part from Charles Napier, the boy I have loved as a son, the pride of my old friend Eardley, without a word, without a sign!" The father heard a convulsive sob; he drew his child to him, his arms encircled her, and then he said: "I must perform a friend's duty, though it be negative; at some distant time Charles may recall my words, and feel my regard for him had animated me. On your deathbed, Eardley," he added, as if in commune with himself, "I pledged my honour I would be a true friend to those you had left in trouble and care. Your trust in me was vast. Alas, alas! how suddenly are my hopes on this head annihilated. Still, Charles Napier, we must meet once more; the parting will be a final one."

"O do not speak so discouragingly, dear father!" said Ellen earnestly. Such sad reflections will retard your recovery." Then she leant upon her father's hand; and looking up into his face with something of her own hoping smile upon her lip, she said: "For me to hope, for my mind to own a rational thought, you must believe, and show me you believe, that worldly trials are not always to be a source of continued grief; that you will seek for fortitude and resignation; then we shall be able to extract the poison from affliction, and deprive misfortune of its victory."

"To reflect on personal grief, to bewail its pang, is, I know, a selfish act, my child," answered the father; "but bear with me: my illness has been heavy, and mental shocks topple down our strength of intellect and vigour. Still I will seek for fortitude; for thy dear sake, my child, I will strive to banish melancholy thoughts." He essayed a smile to reassure his child, for he saw her heart was unusually sad; but the smile was an admixture of pain and sensibility. Ellen sighed deeply as she contemplated this poor effort to be cheerful.

"Everything tells me, Ellen," remarked Colonel

Neville sadly, "that suspicions of foul play are entertained by our Vallis friends in reference to poor Harry Napier; and I cannot divest my mind of the terrible idea that William knows more on this subject than he dares confess. These are my convictions: I have long entertained them, and they fill Charles Napier's mind likewise. When he sat by me the other day, I saw him gaze around him and sigh, as if he was bidding adieu to things he loved, and then he pondered long, and more than once his eye was bent in painful interest on me. O, my child, your father's fate is hard; there is no one substantial source of comfort on which I dare rely." There was a pause. Ellen did not answer; she thought it better at this moment to allow her father to disburden his mind of his sad convictions. She felt he had long wished to talk with her on the subject he had now broached, and she thought it best he should do so—she therefore was silent. At last her father again spoke; she was astonished to find he had turned to an analysis of his own conduct in reference to his son. "Reflection such as mine has convinced me how fatally a parent may err in the education of his child.

The error I committed cannot be evaded now ; its evil fruits are too painfully enforced before me. Yes, Ellen, sadly did I neglect your brother. From that neglect his young impetuous heart became benumbed to my authority ; my very presence embarrassing. It was my conduct that chased affection and tenderness away. William and I were strangers at a time when we should have been dear and familiar friends. I flung him on the world. There was no warning voice—no kind hand stretched forth to save him. He fell, for he was taught nothing of the evils inseparable from his position ; the worldly importance attached to my station in society was his ruin. He was left as a boy to his own devices : no wonder that he became a voluntary slave to the prejudices and customs of those with whom he associated." Colonel Neville must have been reflecting on some evil and rash act of his son's, perhaps the same for which he banished him from his roof, for he said :—

" 'Twas a great crime ; in contemplating its enormity I was blinded in my judgment. A Neville's honour till then had never been sullied ; though, Ellen, those of our house have been condemned for

their pride, there has ever been uniform integrity observed in their dealings with all men. Still I pursued a wrong course, and thus ratified my former misgovernment. I have long felt this, but I have been too stern, too unyielding, to acknowledge my error to him who has braved my authority."

Colonel Neville's next words to his daughter were :—

"I never did in my home that which I was called upon to do. I never was what I seemed. In the true spirit of the word, in my household I was a rotten prop gaudily gilded. Fool, fool that I was ! life was fair and promising, but I would not walk in the right path. Once my nerves were firm, my constitution strong,—now my system is disjointed, broken down ; through nervous affection, every day a torment, every circumstance a source of irritation ; and so it ever will be with him who is afflicted, burdened with that most distressing of all maladies,—remorse !"

"My dear father," Ellen here ventured to say, "you have always been a kind, good parent. Others suffer even as you do. There is no earthly means of controlling human happiness, or assuredly

be assumed, he delays his return home, when suddenly an event happened which separated the husband and wife, and, as far as Henry Napier is concerned, all is mystery and horror. We know how the poor young wife has suffered. Had Sir Eardley lived, conceive his feelings ; and is it not apparent that his family would have been left in a far happier condition, had they received from him sufficient only to have provided for the common necessities of life, than all their present wealth, accumulating as it has from a tainted source."

There was a long silence ; Ellen Neville had been ignorant of these facts touching the Napiers. She reflected on their misfortunes. She saw that an effort of virtue on Sir Eardley's part in his career, a successful effort, and his family might have lived, though limited in worldly importance, a life of home-happiness and felicity. Prosperity and adversity, affluence and want, she felt to be not independent upon moral conduct, and she grieved for the cause, whilst she sympathized in the afflictions of her Vallis friends.

Charles Napier's arrival was here announced, and Colonel Neville was asked if it was his wish to re-

ceive his visiter. The reply was in the affirmative, whereupon Ellen rose hastily and said: "I promised Inez to visit her to-day. I will be home again soon; during my absence there must be no more exciting conversation, or I must exercise the nurse's authority, and send for Dr Powell, when we shall be compelled to lay an embargo on these,"—and, stooping, she kissed her parent's lips, then retreated by an opposite door as Napier entered the chamber.

Colonel Neville held forth his hand to his visiter, and welcomed him in a singularly earnest and impressive manner. There was a silence of some minutes; both were distressingly placed. Napier had early been taught, and his sympathies prompted him to look up to Colonel Neville as a second father; and was he not too the father of her he loved so tenderly? Then the sad harrowing thought obtruded, that these beings, so loved, so revered, were standing in such close relationship to one whom he had reason to suspect, from the hints dropped by Langton, in some way implicated in the mystery which shrouded his brother's conduct. If inquiry was successful, what would be revealed?

how should he then stand in regard to him who reclined upon his couch before him so severely afflicted, and whom every emotion of his own warm heart prompted him to succour?

A wise landlord and good farmer, as Colonel Neville was now, could well supply Napier with much useful information in respect to those arrangements which were essential for him to make prior to his departure; and as he lured his old friend from his sorrow to his hobby, his marked appreciation of his opinions won the Colonel from his melancholy in spite of himself; and called forth from him advice and remarks which were both useful and instructive. Surprised at the extent of the knowledge Napier had acquired on agricultural matters, Colonel Neville asked him:—

“If he had given his attention to the practical duties of a landlord from necessity or inclination; and might he hope to hear that his young friend’s tastes would eventually lead him to settle down to the active, rational life of a country gentleman?”

Napier was on the point of observing that much depended on the result of his undertaking, but, checking the words, he said:—

"You are aware, Colonel, I was destined for the bar; then, after my uncle's kindness, he advocated my entering the army for a time, though I was not to regard it as a profession; but I overruled his wish, and now scarcely understand my office. You did not approve either of my uncle's scheme concerning me, I think?"

Colonel Neville remarked, "I do not approve of the system which makes young men devotees of fashionable society, where ignoble passions are fostered and the genuine feelings of their nature rendered dormant through dissipation, or perverted through evil example. I have marked the evil of the life to which I allude; I have seen those who promised fair, whose intellects were capable of expansion, suddenly sink to a position in no way creditable or praiseworthy. I have seen young men well nurtured, well principled, and with true sympathies, sink insensibly into mere machines, set in motion by evil and disorderly customs; who, in a short period, in spite of the early promise, esteem pleasure to be the revel of gay assemblies, the lounging in a club, the attending a betting-ring, the patronizing a celebrated 'dansense,' or

devotion to that most fatal of all evil lures, the gaming-table. Where *one* resists those baits so seductively set forth, scores gravitate towards that condition which renders the disposition callous to the voice of reason, and fetters the intellect in chains which contract as they corrupt."

"But, Colonel, you" before Napier could proceed further, he was interrupted with—

"I, you would say, pursued the course in reference to my son which I now condemn. Yes; and as errors which affect ourselves are more jealously scrutinized than those which affect others, I am in a position to form a correct conclusion on this head. To be a safe pilot, a man must study the shoals and quicksands which lie in his vessel's way; I was the bad pilot, and my frail bark was wrecked. The lesson of personal experience may be wisely applied in the case of one in whom our interests are fixed; but the *torture* which results from neglect of that knowledge we have learnt, or the false exercise of it, quickens the sense of reason, though it be left to wailing and discontent. I do not reflect one unkind thought on that *profession* which engrossed my early ambition, far from

it; but I must ever condemn the system of decking young men in regimentals, for them to wheedle away time with the view of rubbing off the freshness of youth, and to initiate them in the mysteries of fashionable society. No more—as the weak parent thinks—the error is grossly flagrant. When our country demanded the services of her sons, there was a class of men of high position in society, distinguished for their virtues and intellect, and these were often seen foremost in the van of battle, (and might be so again,) and with their sons fighting by their sides; but does it follow that we are to estimate those who follow a mere idle fashion, as we would the true patriots of whom I speak? No; the fashionable *un*-professional military youth—too often reared in the lap of luxury, famous for his follies, and his idle or debasing occupations—sillily vaunts the trappings of the soldier and the pomp of war, but shrinks from its real danger, and is equally devoid of the hardihood of former times, and of taste for the elegance of modern refinement.”

“ Yet, as there are so many upright and honourable men of the same profession, cannot they exer-

cise an authority over its younger members ? ” asked Napier.

“ An authority over their daily duties, professionally speaking ? Yes ; and they would exercise a moral influence too, if the budding fashionable—I speak of him who has money and birth to render him headstrong and conceited—would condescend to be instructed by the lesson of experience ; but ere you have numbered half my years, if you do not know it already, you will be aware that the pleasure-seeking ensign—lately emancipated, perhaps, from the inquisitorial home authority—considers the good counsel of his senior officer in no measure applicable to *his* case, as *he* is far removed through assumed wealth or station from the necessity of caution, or restraint of inclination. Be assured, Charles, that the less capable a young man is to guide himself, the more readily will he reject, if not despise, the moral assistance of his seniors, if he thinks they have implied by act or deed that he stands in need of it. Stubbornness is own brother to ignorance. You would say, perhaps, ‘ What, is he silly enough to seek to stand alone ? ’ and I answer you, he does far worse ; he commits

a greater error. A different man from the consistent and honourable, crosses his path ; every regiment has its "jackal," who is so clever and adroit in the art of dissimulation, that he is regarded as the *life* of the corps, yet nevertheless he is a "jackal," and takes to *dirty* work with zeal and pleasure. And then there is another kind of individual, who has no objection to be present at a young man's elbow when a "good thing" can be gained. This person assumes a tone of superiority which quite awes the "jackal;" his privileges are so vast, that the "jackal" dare not lay himself *publicly* open to his scrutiny, or he would be stripped without hesitation of his claim to the provender. This man is the *authority* of the regiment ; he has great knowledge of sporting affairs, of which he is chary to impart aught but to his personal *friends*; his seat is perfect "across country;" he has a peculiar sagacity for "handicapping;" his stroke is perfect at billiards, though his play varies a good deal, so it cannot be *confidently* relied on ; he plays *écarté* *occasionally*; and, to cap the sum of his accomplishments, he is "a devilish handsome fellow," so his followers affirm ; a *dead shot*, having dropped his

man more than once. It is not a fact beyond truth, though it be beyond sense, that the pleasure-seeker should regard such an individual's notice and patronage, before the formal and sometimes reprehensive counsel of sincerity; and there are hundreds who have been so cleverly duped by the kind of man to whom I allude, that although plucked of nearly all they possess, they remain ignorant of the cause of their ruin, and are still desirous to appear in his society, or to be esteemed of his *set*."

Napier seemed to reflect on his companion's remarks. He felt for him, because he saw that personal bitterness was tincturing his argument. Wilton, the curse of his life—his son, the bane of his happiness—cast a shade over the knowledge and ability to be found in his words. Presently, Napier said:—

"But I have heard you affirm, Colonel, that the man whose ability may be rendered of practical utility, must possess some knowledge of the world, and be familiar with the thoughts of his fellow-man. To succeed in this, should his sphere be circumscribed? If so, he may grow familiar with the customs of *particular society*, but be of little

public utility, if called upon to deal with an element of which he has no practical knowledge, or towards which habit had rendered him indifferent. In shutting out the usual high road, by which young men travel to obtain a knowledge of the world, what new avenue would you open through which *the* desirable object may be attained?" and the speaker smiled, as if he took a pleasure; or interest rather, in arguing with his old friend.

"I would open a path that admitted of a more general range of intellectual vision, than the one you term the *usual high road*," answered Colonel Neville. "The herbalist, in the compilation of his stores for after-study, seeks for them amongst Nature's disconnected and disunited fruits, as they seem to us; and these he arranges and combines, through care and science, until even we can perceive the hidden aptitude of things which ignorance could not solve. After the mental qualities of a youth had been developed, I would place him in the extended field of human nature, that he might become acquainted with the follies and the virtues, the defects and the good which influence *general* society; that he should note the

attributes of right, and the operation of wrong ; and whilst he contemplated the workings and qualities of the machine, through the effect of those abstract images which floated before his mental eye, I would look for the reason to glean a sensible schooling, and with greater confidence, for the sympathies to retain their *natural* power, and glow with a sense of inward comfort, of prescribed duty, when the home-voice came to utter its hopes."

"Still, as you assert, there is danger of no small degree in the life open to him, of whom we use a somewhat anomalous expression, the unprofessional military youth. Do you shield him from temptation by sending him into the world for enlightenment? Is he not likely to be infected with its errors in his search after its truths? To avoid Scylla, it seems to me, you would expose him to Charybdis."

"'Tis the fraternization, Charles, which is to be dreaded," was the answer ; "the fraternization of impulsive hearts, animal spirits, and gay tastes ; and, as amongst the youth of the present day, it is not the *fashion* to distinguish themselves by con-

duct which is commendable, he who is admitted into those circles, though he might falter for a time, eventually leans to and sympathizes in the tastes and errors of his companions. That action or conduct, whether of good or evil report, which exalts a young man in the estimation of his companions, produces a triumph in the mind, of which he is in no slight degree proud ; and if folly and extravagance be the order of the day, custom and flattery have a way of blinding the reason, and making the fashion both familiar and agreeable. The system I now advocate embraces greater advantages, and is less open to danger. It is true," said the old man, very sadly,—“that there are some who seem not to possess the capacity for improvement, their every step being retrograde. These I turn from with a sigh, and confess my argument to refer to the necessity of worldly knowledge and true experience, for those whom society expects, from the promise set forth, to become guardians of its respectability. When a young man enters on the journey of life, we find much ardour and expectation mingling with self-conceit, and which require many hard rubs and lessons to soften down. Books are not the means

whereby these natural weaknesses may be corrected ; there must be a certain commerce with his more experienced fellow-man ; an application in the study of his character, as much as before exercised in the intellectual development. Men's hearts speak pretty much the same language ; but, in learning it, stern rules are requisite. In conclusion, Napier, what I wish you to understand is this : I would familiarize a young man with the peculiarities and traits of the great human family. I would send him amongst men in general, into society, as an atom of the great and busy mass,—not have him fraternize with a peculiar set,—and thus excite through external objects, without debasing the sympathies, those powers of observation with which he is endowed, to laudable emulation and activity. Education to the human mind has been compared to sculpture to a block of marble ; and if the figure might be extended, I would add, that worldly knowledge, prudently obtained, is *the light* which gives expression, force, and character, to the art of the statuary."

Colonel Neville concluded his remarks with difficulty. His head reclined languidly on his pillow,

and a wan hue of sickness, which succeeded the slight flush which the effort of speaking had called up, caused Napier to reproach himself for having prolonged the discussion.

Napier was scarcely less affected than his friend ; he felt the hour of their sad parting had arrived, and he divined the cause of the old man's deep emotion. Napier approached, his hand rested on his old friend's shoulder ; he would have spoken, but the words died upon his lips : he bent reverently, when he caught the remark,—

“ This is a final parting, Charles. God bless you and preserve you from evil.”

Napier's heart was too full for reply ; he moved slowly away. As he stood by the door, he cast a glance back : he saw a yearning gaze upon him, a motion of the hand, which seemed to invite or solicit his return. He bent once more over the afflicted man. The parent's nerve was weak—it was above nature to avoid the parent's plea ; with thrilling earnestness, he said :—

“ My son ! my weak and erring son ! Charles, should the *worst* be realized, remember your old friend's love for you, and be merciful.”

A sudden flush crimsoned Napier's brow ; speak he must, though reason was sadly bewildered. At last he summoned resolution to say :—

“ Things may be better than they seem. Should your son cross my path, I will use forbearance ; and, if it be proved that there is *one* more guilty than he, I will remember the prayer of my dearest friend.”

* * * *

Napier approached the window of his room, and leant listlessly against it. The first gray tints of night were shadowing the vale. There was a favourite summer-house on the skirts of the lawn, and he fancied he discerned the white drapery of a female dress through the open window. At first he thought it might be his sister—Inez it could not be ; as yet she had never reached so far from the house. The warm blood mounted to his brow. He quickly descended to the garden. Pause, Napier, pause ; cross not that threshold : do not let the selfishness of passion triumph over thee. Gaze not with a soul of love on that sweet being who ponders there on the solitude of her future—but he moved forward, he encroached on that sanctuary.

Ellen Neville was before him, her head resting on

her hand, and her form bowed forward in the touching attitude of sorrow. She started as her ear recognised a well-known step ; and before her eye arose, a tear was wiped away, but she could not so easily erase the sudden flush that mantled neck and brow. Her gaze for a moment rested on Napier, but it sank immediately. No *word* had yet betrayed the one deep secret of Napier's life, therefore, if Ellen was not altogether unconscious of what might come, she knew not how intense that affection was which he bore for her. Certainly, as they were situated, it was almost madness in Napier to give way to the impulse which led him to Ellen's side. Napier could not well help loving Ellen Neville. It is true he might have mastered himself, and saved her no light uneasiness, but for that downcast, agitated countenance, that silence which conquered a thousand resolutions in a moment.

Napier was even more agitated than Ellen, —her confusion was infectious. As he addressed her his voice shook, and with a trouble in the cadence which seemed to affect her deeply, for she could not restrain her tears. He sat by her and spoke of her father's kindness to him—of his own

warm hopes for his restoration to health ; with manly frankness he thanked her for her goodness to poor Inez ; and expressed a wish for her to visit Vallis often, and still charitably endeavour to comfort his sorrowing and much affected relative. So far Napier had sustained himself with seeming fortitude : suddenly his manner changed ; he became apparently lost in thought, or so overpowered with the sensitiveness of his feelings, that he was unable to continue conversation. Ellen could not have misunderstood him. She had not spoken a word ; and, as if she had gained strength at last to escape from so expressive a silence, she rose from her seat, and endeavoured to say "farewell" with firmness ; but the word came faintly : her hand trembled in Napier's nervous grasp

"One moment ;—one word before we part," said he, vainly striving to control himself. "Ellen, do you think I can part with you without a word ? Do you think I can have known you so long, and have no selfish interest to reveal, no prayer to offer, no hope to explain ? I would have avoided this avowal now, but I cannot. Ellen, my love is earnest as it is fervent ; it has been, for time longer than I can remember, the one

ambition and instinct of my hope. It has grown with my growth, and strengthened with my strength. O, do not think I would utter a syllable to pain you"—seeing she was greatly distressed; "but the fact of parting from you is too great for my strength; and if I do not bear with me a consciousness that I am kindly remembered by you, my unhappiness will be beyond limit and measure." He paused, and bent over his companion in breathless agitation. With a great effort Ellen answered him, and an expression of intense sorrow suffused her countenance, as she said:

"Forbear to urge this topic; do not speak of love between us; it is a thought against which I must steel my heart. Fate has decreed that my path shall be rugged, wild, and lone."

"O, Ellen," cried Napier, "can you suffer and I be unmoved? My life, my happiness,—all is bound up in your will. Shall mine be an unavailing prayer?"

With sudden effort Ellen withdrew her hand from his, and said, "It must be. If I am to suffer, I will suffer alone. At a calmer moment your own reason will tell you how cruelly we

- should err against ourselves in giving way to hopes which are, which must ever be, delusive." The
- words were spoken ; over that sweet face were heart-sorrow and misery, but in the eye there was no light, no hope for Napier. " God help me," he said wearily as his head sank upon his breast ; " O, Ellen, this is very, very terrible ;" and sinking on a bench, his strong frame shook convulsively.

Ellen gazed upon him with an eye of pitying tenderness. Her words, though they gave no hope,—she could not be sincere and do so,—implied that she was not indifferent to his love ; nor was she. And now that he was so crushed and wounded in spirit, her firm resolve was shaken ; an *instinct*, earnest, merciful, and tender, guided her steps to him. Her hand rested a moment upon his,—his eye arose, cowering and dejected ; but a shadow crossed the rude window : the glance of both was quickly turned there ; and had the arch-fiend stood before them they could scarcely have been more startled, as with the twilight they perceived the basilisk eye of Wilton bent in scowling curiosity upon them. With an exclamation of horror and alarm Ellen sank upon the seat ; but Napier, with pulses

bounding as if they would burst, with heart of ungovernable indignation, sprang to his feet. He knew not his own will ; he wanted only to be placed side by side with this shameless intruder on his privacy ; but his impetuous desire was frustrated. The summer-house was constructed on the verge of a cliff overhanging the main road ; and as a deep ravine separated the entrance and the spot where Wilton had appeared, it took Napier some minutes before he reached the spot whereon the intruder had stood. No one was there ; he almost believed he had been subject to a strange delusion, when the sound of a horse struck upon his ear, and, springing on a bank, the outline of a receding equestrian was discernible. Napier recognised the figure. With nervous step and contracted brow he retraced his steps to the place where he had left Ellen ; but she had disappeared. For some minutes his footsteps were fettered to the spot ; though feelings of deep indignation and amazement were strong upon him, he sighed deeply ; the dream was rudely broken up. He quitted the room with emotions forming a sad, strange contrast to those he had experienced, as he entered it one half-hour before.

CHAPTER VII.

A FEW days after Napier's visit to Mowbray, three individuals were assembled in the same room, in the house in Cavendish Square, into which the reader has already entered. The inert and indifferent,—the callous and the scheming,—the bitter and revengeful were met together. The Countess D'Albani was peculiarly assiduous in performing the duties of hostess; and though William Neville touched not a morsel of the several good things which garnished the board at which she officiated, she seemed to take some interest herself in the meal, and appeared to derive satisfaction from the social tone exhibited by her son. The whole thing

was a deception. Wilton had still a game to play, —he had still to gild a stern necessity. And Neville, who knew his companion's falsehood and faithlessness, understood that he had been summoned to meet him; not, as it seemed, to indulge in the sympathies of the really social hour, but for the purpose of discussing some dark and devious scheme which his companion's crafty brain conceived it necessary to adopt in the present position of affairs.

To say that Neville did not feel the degraded part he was compelled to act would be untrue; he was not so hardened that he could turn at will from the inner irritation and gloom to which he was often subject. There were moments when existence was a curse; when he had no heart for enjoyment; he felt weighed down with a heavy numbness. When these horrors were upon him, he would seek to flee from them by hard drinking. It can be conceived how much this system of blinding conscience injured and enfeebled his moral energies, giving a potent advantage to an enemy who was sure to make a harvest of his follies. Enemy, however, as Wilton was, he was not so dangerous to Neville as Neville was to himself.

CHAPTER VII.

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THE HIRE OF VAGABONDS

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ished suspicion ; he passed from anecdote to anecdote with ease and freedom. No spleen, no sneer at others, seemed to tincture his sentiments ; his eye beamed with pleasure ; and there was even a certain amount of dignity thrown over his composed and tranquil manner. Neville drank deeply ; the nerveless and brooding man suddenly became social and communicative. The devil's remedy against misfortune was successful at last ; fresh wine was produced ; and now, singular as it may seem, Neville, in the presence of the man who had ever been his evil genius, began to rail at fortune, confining himself to the interesting occupation of abusing every one but himself and his companion. Wilton saw the time was ripe ; as Neville paused in the midst of some angry invective, launched, it would seem, against the Napiers or Langton, he quietly observed,—

“ You will not be angry if I say, that I am surprised that a man of your nerve and courage, who would boldly face the pistol of an enemy, should be subdued by the dread of being fired at by a pop-gun.” He did not allow his companion time to reply, but said : “ I am sorry you should have

broached *the* subject to-night; but since you have done so, I may as well tell you that I have new difficulties to oppose. I must be off to Paris, Neville;" he paused for a time, then remarked, slowly, "Napier passed through town, on his way to that capital, the day before yesterday; Langton accompanied him. Can you remember my hint to you about this individual? I mistrust him, and have reason. I know the purpose of Napier's journey; but this I should not mind, if it was not for the fact that the Armstrongs are, strange enough, under the protection of the Napiers. Stranger still, eh! a scurvy trick of dame Fortune's. You can fancy the necessity of looking after Armstrong; he is growing wilful, and is likely to be just where he should not be, and to do just what he ought not to do; always the way with tools of his reckless intemperate calibre. I must be upon his trail. I have work cut out, and I should not doubt success if I had somebody over there to co-operate with me; whilst I am looking after Armstrong, I shall require a keen eye to be kept on Napier's movements."

Neville seemed somewhat sobered by Wilton's

remarks; he reflected for a few minutes, and then said,—

“ Would not D'Aigrigny do? he would not scruple to aid us.”

“ Oh, he will aid us in more ways than one; but in this task he is not the man I want; I cannot rely upon his *honour*.”—Mr Wilton laid some stress upon this last word.—“ If he makes a false move, he won't consent to be put right. The man I want, Neville, is he whom self-interest will render watchful; one who will hear all that passes around with impassive countenance, and retain it with faithful memory; a man of importance in the eyes of the Parisian world; a gentleman, and withal ever anxious for the success of the work in hand—ready to fight if necessary.”

Neville's lip was tightly compressed—his cheek pallid.

“ When will this scheming, this caution end?” he said, nervously; “ when will my mind be released from this horror? *How* can I escape from the hell and torment which pursue me?”

“ When you resolve on seeking neither to justify your actions, nor condemn your conduct,” answered

Wilton, calmly ; “ when you have the will to view things according to their influence on self, without affecting an interest in their operation on the peace or happiness of others.”

Neville gloomily said, “ And what shall we reap ?”

“ Success, man !—success !” cried Wilton bending a keen, daring glance on his companion. “ Forward, Neville !—forward !” he cried inspiringly : “ Act we must ; it is useless to look back. I am resolved—I go to Paris ; the campaign shall be opened there. I am prepared to perplex rights—to hold the world and its empty-pated pack at bay. I have resources within me which never fail me at a pinch ; and if the worst comes, I will still cheat the eye and brave society—the privilege of intellect, backed by the freedom of a brave man’s will.” Then, calling up his former gaiety, he cried, “ I fear my wine has lost its attraction. Come, I will broach this bottle, and give you a toast : ‘ Success in *all* our plans !’ ” For a moment, a change came over Neville’s countenance, and an expression which Wilton had never seen before. However, such was the ascendancy of the latter, Neville

could not assert independence, or oppose his companion's will. He drank the toast. The wine produced a beneficial effect as far as Wilton's plans were concerned. Cordiality followed: there was no longer a disputant or contentious sound. Conversation, on the part of Wilton, was carried on in a subdued earnest voice. At last, he gained his point. "Go with you?" said the inebriated man,— "of course I will. Better stay in England, eh!—Langton said that—did he?—We'll see if we don't confound 'em! Devilish good liquor that, Wilton—send some over.—That's a good fellow!—I'll off now.—My adieux to the Countess.—Be up to start early."—And with a cruel stride for the poor chairs that stood in his way, Neville left the room.

The door had scarcely closed, when the Countess d'Albani entered the apartment. She approached Wilton, who stood self-satisfied and calm, and said, in a deep husky voice, "You have succeeded; when do you leave?"

"In the morning early. You said Livia was with Mademoiselle d'Aigrigny, did you not?"

"Yes, she has written too! I am not satisfied with her letter. She seems melancholy and de-

sponding. She complains of the unnatural restraint you impose upon her, in the concealment of her connexion with you ; and says, in not recognising you in society in Paris, she shall be acting with a duplicity which is quite abhorrent to her feelings. I have replied again, that you are going on a mission of vast personal importance to us, and that a branch of the family with whom she resides are inimical to our interests ; it is, therefore, positively necessary for her to act as you enjoin. Perhaps I had better go to her. I want to leave this country for a time, Louis. I have a greater antipathy to this cold, selfish, dreary city, than I can express. I am sick of the life I lead ; the monotony kills me mentally ; if it was not for things you know, I would sooner die than vegetate thus."

"You must remain here ; your presence is essential to my plans," answered Wilton. "I have weighed matters carefully. It would not do for you to appear in Paris. If I could spare you, I fear your misanthropical spirit, mother ! You will not observe my maxim—'That the best use to which the tongue and the face can be applied, is to cast a bright sunny veil over what is passing within the mind.' However, as you cannot do this, let the

prospect of success reconcile you to your present inactive life."

"Ay, success!" cried the Italian woman sharply,—"for five years you have cheated me with the word. 'Tis but a sound. In the place of working out your schemes, you entangle yourself more and more; and then you have to plot and counterplot to ensure your own safety. Talk not of future bright prospects: I tell you, Louis—you who are so secret with me—that I know enough to cause me to be misanthropical. Go forward; denounce the poor fool who was here anon, and who is so maddened by the tyranny you exercise over him, that your life is not secure in his presence. Denounce him at once, I say, and overwhelm the upstarts at Mowbray. Then let us fly! My nerve fails me. The prediction of that woman Le Normand haunts me. She said, 'I should live a lone life; and that, in the last years of my life, I should sorrow alone.' And you, Louis, you are not so much at ease as you wish to appear. Your feelings are not enviable ones. You know your own thoughts. Be cautious; if danger, personal danger, is nigh you, fly far from it."

Wilton heard his mother out; then he fixed his

keen eye upon her, and said, in a low grave voice, " You have committed a very rash act ; you have listened to what has been said in this room to-night. I am sorry you did so, because you will be uneasy, and yet have no power to help me. Now listen to me, mother : You ask me to fly ; to give up my task ; and I must tell you why I will not take your advice. From my youth up, you filled my mind with a bitter sense of injuries we had received at the hands of the Nevilles ; and you spared no pains to convince me how easily and how justly I could redress our wrongs. I have obeyed you, and with the labour have heaped up some guilt and shame upon my own head. I have laboured so hard, I have made myself so familiar with the purpose of my pride and anger, that I cannot dismiss it from my mind if I would. It is my thought by day—my dream at night—and now, so resolute am I to succeed, that I will steep my soul deeper in crime, and brave the consequences, rather than relinquish my object. You know all ! I can, therefore, speak freely now ! You must remain here ; this house will be a refuge for me in case of need. I go to Paris ; I take that reckless fool, Neville, with me,

because I cannot trust him out of my sight. My plans are to entangle Napier in such a way that he shall be at my mercy, or devise some means to bring about a worse result. I cannot afford half-measures. Nay, mother, wince not; there is no halting-place now! He is on the track!—he is in my path! Still I will be careful,” he observed, seeing his mother’s alarm: “for instance, Livia will be at hand; perhaps she may aid me indirectly. Napier is young in the world—he is susceptible—has an ardent disposition, and so forth: he may be smitten—I can *then* exercise a jealous guardianship. Livia may have her fancy out and claim me then; or it may be that Neville’s old passion will be revived, now he has lost his last fancy; and he may presume upon former intimacy and ruffle Napier’s temper. They will be all thrown together, that is certain. I shall be about them, lynx-eyed and daring.As you say,” he added after a pause,—“I am not at ease; latterly my nervous system has been deranged; but action, labour, will redress all,—I shall soon be myself again.”.....

CHAPTER VIII.

THOSE of my readers whose expectation and curiosity have been at all excited at the relation of events which have followed in my tale, will not be surprised if I tell them I find it necessary to transport them in imagination to Paris. The day on which we mentally visit the handsome and luxurious capital of France was fine and exhilarating, as the middle of October sometimes proves in even our fickle clime. As it was early morning, the pleasure-seeker was not out ; the volatile spirit of the Parisians had not risen to its meridian ; eleven o'clock was too early for them to have emancipated their wits from the depression which is not unusual to the mercurial temperament after a night's revel.

Charles Napier was seated in his solitary apartment, with his breakfast still untouched before him. The door of the room opened, and Langton entered with a serious and concerned air.

"Not stirred yet!" he said, approaching the occupant—"Why, I left you there an hour ago. Napier, this will not do."—He checked himself, as he scanned the brow of care before him, and then added with a sympathizing voice: "My dear friend, yours I know to be a painful duty; still, if you would obtain success, your course must be pursued with nerve and firmness, or you will trip in the hour of actual danger. Courage, Napier!—courage!"

"I shall not falter, depend upon it," answered Charles Napier gravely. "I have been reflecting, Langton, that is all—looking back a little—the occupation has not disqualified me for my task. Now, I will banish such retrospection, and show you I have the nerve to commence the part I have undertaken; personal feeling, fortune, life itself, are as nothing, until I can clear up this mystery concerning my brother."

Langton's countenance varied a good deal in

its expression at Napier's words; but he made no reply. He handed a note to his companion and walked to the window. Napier perused its contents, then joined his friend.

"You have seen M. Marcel, then, Langton?" he said. "Why did you not tell me you were going to visit him?"

"You forget, you have several times expressed a wish to have an interview with this powerful personage; now, you see, your purpose can be accomplished." The reply was evasive; but it satisfied Napier, who, when he made memoranda of some questions he wished to put to Monsieur Marcel, remarked, "I will wait on him at once. Come, Langton; his note is significant."

In the course of a few minutes they reached the bureau of the chief magistrate of the secret police. On the entrance of Napier and his friend they were shown into an outer office; in which place were seated several individuals busily employed, whose countenances, though of impassive expression, evinced marked character and intelligence. There were many persons passing to and fro from this apartment to a room beyond; but as to the nature

of their thoughts or duties, surmise would be quite at fault; whatever the inward sensation might be, the outward appearance was calm—indifferent. They came, they went, and returned, without pleasure, interest, or concern; yet some were burdened with and had revealed grave secrets, social and political.

Napier's card having been passed on by one of the moving actors in this scene, he and Langton, after a few minutes' detention, were desired to follow a messenger who had, it seemed, been commissioned to show them to the presence of him whom Napier was wont, ever after his interview, to designate, "The consolidated fund of secrets, politic and domestic, of the country."

M. Marcel received his visitors graciously; if he had seen Mr Langton before, no one would have supposed it, from his manner towards him.

At a careless glance, we should not suppose this minister capable of wielding a power where hypocrisy was to become nature, and art an all sustaining instrument; but on a careful perusal of the countenance, when he spoke to the subject, the activity of mind,—the quickness of comprehension,

—the instinct of office, were remarkable. M. Marcel was a bold, intelligent, clever personage,—a superior magistrate,—had sympathies for the honourable and worthy,—knew men well, even the bad, and was vigilant in his regard of them. Coming directly to the question between him¹ and his visiter, he said :—

“ I have given my attention to the painful subject which was the burden of your communication to me, Mr Napier, and I have the satisfaction to inform you that I have obtained a partial clue to a mystery that had baffled the science of one of the most experienced of the corps over which I have the honour to preside. I accidentally learnt, yesterday, from a friend of yours, that your mother’s name was Hargrave—is the information correct ? ”

“ Indeed ! ” answered Napier, somewhat surprised ; but seeing the magistrate about to speak, he checked a remark he was going to make, and merely added, “ You were correctly informed.”

M. Marcel sounded a bell at his elbow, and as it was answered, he said :—

“ Marôt’s attendance ! ”

The clerk silently withdrew. Scarcely had he done so when a slight, well-knit, darkly clad figure

glided into the apartment, and stood at the command of his chief. This man held a good situation; he was a well-trusted, confidential agent,—a faithful servant of a system open to great abuses. He was dressed in plain clothes; his eye, like the minister's, was the only expressive thing in the face,—that seemed to rest on everything at once. As to the countenance itself, nothing could be learnt in it; all natural emotion, such as spring from surprise, terror, or interest, concern, sympathy, or scorn, had long been consigned, through a careful schooling, to a depth beyond human ken; and now he stood as the initiated mystery of that body who, though seldom recognised, were everywhere at hand when least expected, looking on upon intrigue, crime, and folly with cold impassive countenance, yet with a vigilant mind; whose duty was to chronicle every fact, and to note them afterwards in ledgers A to Z with terrible distinctness. The magistrate turned to his subordinate, and said, as he pointed to a long row of business-like looking books:—

“Take letter N, and read from the cross you will find at the second page.”

The agent did so. With a low matter-of-fact

voice he commenced :—" Napier, Henry, Englishman ; residence, Hotel des Princes ; arrival, the 17th November 18—. Figure, tall and well made ; appearance, gentlemanly ; olive complexion, dark hazel eye, brown hair and whiskers. Reported in salons to be heir to large estates ; open and liberal ; lives extravagantly, consequently an object of interest to some idlers who have contrived to make his acquaintance. Known at the Opera des Italiens, the Hippodrome, and frequents S—— and V——," mentioning two noted gaming-houses, " but seldom plays. Is generally accompanied by two of his countrymen, N—— and W——," (who are noted in respective ledgers, fol. 7, 49). " Marôt reports that N—— and W—— have designs on Mr Napier's purse,—has seen the latter tempted to play by N——, and noted W—— in shuffling N——'s cards practise the Auvergne trick. Still W—— very cautious. As soon as M. Napier is excited, prevails upon him to leave the public rooms and repair to W——'s private hotel. Has observed M. Napier leave at a late hour. On the 28th February, year following arrival, M. Napier returning from opera defended Count Molé with gallantry against attack of three ruffians."

Marôt paused at this point—Napier had listened with feeling of acute sensitiveness, and when the agent touched on his brother's gallantry, he said, with emotion :—

“ Like him, like him—his was a gallant heart.”

M. Marcel noticed Napier's agitation, and decided, it would seem, that it would be better to proceed as far as he intended in this stage of the business, before he listened to his comments.

“ Turn to letter H, Marôt,” he said ; “ you will find a mark in the index against the name I require.”

Marôt followed these instructions with mechanical precision, and commenced, “ Hargrave and Lady ; residence, Château —— ; from Marseilles, October 25th ” (“ The same year that Count Molé's affair occurred to which you listened,” interposed M. Marcel.) “ The lady of great personal attraction. M. Hargrave, a fine handsome man, with dark mustache, no whiskers ; lived secluded ; however, an intimacy existed between him and W. and N., who had again appeared in Paris. A watchful surveillance over W. on account of the affair of Count Molé's. M. Hargrave visited W.'s hotel at night,—

high-play the occupation. This connexion existed until January, when M. Hargrave and lady suddenly left Paris for England. W. and N. immediately followed. Three weeks after this double move, Marôt discovered that the lady of M. Hargrave had returned to Paris in company with W.; reported fact at Bureau; instructed to make out W.'s position. Found that W. had been acting as friend—M. Hargrave hourly expected. Information, so gained, presumed to be incorrect, as M. Hargrave did not appear; and W. in daily attendance. Lady suddenly removed from Château —, and traces lost for a time. On the 2d March, Marôt learned from Armand (one of the staff), that a foreign lady was confined in — (an obscure part of the city, M. Napier, explained M. Marcel); from account, lady of deranged-intellect. Instructed to learn cause of foreigner residing in strange district. Did so; found lady same as lived in Château — with M. Hargrave. Much secrecy observed. Man in authority sullen, morose, evidently disguised. Marôt thought he knew this person: suddenly house abandoned; no trace of steps taken by former occupants. Police at fault—at last, Marôt, on 25th

same month, encountered individual on guard of lady of M. Hargrave, who had eluded his vigilance. Recognised him as one going by name De Morney, a hanger on of W.'s; had been a nautical man, and English without question. Anxious to be thought a Frenchman—in a moment of excitement, English nautical oath betrayed him. Did not shun observation—had money—frequented several gaming-houses, betting with success. Last month, in company with a rough sailor—like person left for Italy—not returned. Order of sale of M. Hargrave's effects in the possession of M. Marcel ;" here Marôt ceased reading; at a sign from his chief he retired.

M. Marcel now took a small parcel from his desk, and, unfolding it, handed a closed note to Napier, the order referred to. Napier opened it and held it before him. "It reminds me of my brother's writing," he said slowly; "if written by another, it is a clever counterfeit." He returned the paper to the magistrate without further comment. His face was pale and grave.

M. Marcel now took up a small case, and placed it likewise before Napier, observing, "This has been traced to have been amongst M. Hargrave's

effects." It was a handsome bauble, composed of blue enamel, mounted with precious stones.

Napier had opened the case, a miniature likeness was exposed to his sight, and he exclaimed, with a voice of deep emotion, "My brother! it is indeed a faithful likeness of him."

M. Marcel was silent for a short space, no doubt from respect for Napier's grief: at length he said, "The information I received last evening in reference to your mother's maiden name, has cleared up points which were obscure. Your brother and M. Hargrave were one and the same person; and the female whose position was for a time so dubious, is your relative, the Lady Inez Napier: these things are clear enough. On reporting the intelligence to Marôt which I had obtained, he recognised the likeness between your brother and the miniature in my possession; he has endeavoured to obtain some information respecting the party who disposed of it, but with no good result. Now, M. Napier, you must submit to my putting a few questions to you;" and, turning over a sheet before him, M. Marcel said:—"The Lady Inez Napier, so your statement informs me, found her way to England in March last from

Paris, whence she had escaped from the harsh guardianship of an individual to whose care she had been consigned by a certain Mr Wilton. Does his excellency the British Ambassador know of these passages in the sad history of this lady ?”

“ He does not,” answered Napier. “ I suppressed such painful matter until I could personally take counsel of him and yourself.”

“ You have acted with discretion, M. Napier,” said the magistrate; “ though I tell you I judge with the art of the bureau. The same sagacity bids me advise you further still to conceal these facts from his Excellency. This morning there has been an arrival to our capital of more interest to you than that of the foreign potentates who have reached us. These first-mentioned individuals are under my parental watchfulness, and it would be a heavy blow and great discouragement to the cause of justice, if society at this juncture was to look slightly on my protégé. Lord Mainville, had he a shade of suspicion relative to these circumstances which we are canvassing, would close his doors, and most probably drive from the capital, by such a step, the very men I am anxious to retain for the

present amongst us. At this bureau we rather adopt the Italian proverb, which tells us, 'that honey is better than vinegar as a bait to catch wasps.' "

M. Marcel turned again to his notes and perused them with care ; then he continued his interrogatory :—

"Have you memoranda of the appearance and characteristics of the individual who guarded Lady Inez Napier during her incarceration here ?"

"I have," answered Napier, and he handed the required particulars to the magistrate. They underwent a careful perusal.

"Person tall, strongly made, black hair, small deep-set eyes, narrow forehead, heavy eyebrow." Thus he read ; then referring to an extract in his own hand, he reflected a while, then remarked :—
"Did it occur to you, Mr Napier, to make inquiry of people of the name of Armstrong ; or of any one capable of affording information concerning the personal appearance of a young man of that name, who visited this capital some few years ago in company with Mr Wilton ? He was a lawless character, and attracted our notice. Marôt, whose memory seldom

fails him, is of opinion that he visited us, not long since, under the *nom de guerre* of De Morney."

Napier was very much surprised; he saw that through some secret channel M. Marcel had obtained information which he was using for his benefit. "I am sorry," said he, "I am not provided with the necessary information."

Mr Langton then said: "I think I can supply M. Marcel with the information he seeks." He took a scrap of paper from his tablets, and handed it to the magistrate. A keen eye was directed to it. "Brief and pertinent," he said. "Mr Langton, you would rival Marôt in brevity and acuteness:" and now, after examining his own notes, he remarked in a manner that his visitors only partially caught his words: "Marked with smallpox; the difficulty is adjusted. Smallpox! this discovery affords me relief. Smallpox! a great help to identity; neither moustache nor beard can hide this malady's handiwork. I may retain this?" and he laid the paper with his own notes.

Napier now said, "I would fain put a few questions to you, M. Marcel;" the magistrate for the first time smiled and replied:—

"I should establish, M. Napier, a most injurious precedent did I acquiesce in your wish. Be satisfied at present with what you suspect; vigilant eyes are watching for you: the key to the mystery is wanting; but with some sleight of hand we may prove more ingenious workmen than Mr Wilton expects. In my experience I have rarely seen the schemer on his guard *at all times* against surprise when danger threatens him; let us hope that my conclusions will be correct concerning the matter at issue."

Napier bowed acquiescence to these remarks, and was about to withdraw when M. Marcel further added:—

"In regard to your own government, I should recommend that you sought society freely, to intimate that amusement, pleasure, and novelty had drawn you to our gay capital; and pray do not shun the society of any one individual who is esteemed eligible by our class."

The bell was sounded, and Napier and his friend quitted the bureau. For a few minutes M. Marcel perused the memoranda before him; he seemed satisfied with the inspection. Marôt was standing

near ; his chief beckoned him to him and placed Mr Langton's scrap in his hand.

"The bird has flown, Monsieur," was Marôt's remark.

"True," replied M. Marcel ; "but we know the authority of habit. He is a gambler : he will be drawn here or betray himself elsewhere ; we have found it so in other cases.....We have now an insight into this business. This young man Napier interests me : devote yourself to his person ; be secret and watchful : he will have difficulties to encounter. I do not mistrust his good sense ; but that ardour and impetuosity so conspicuous in the countenance, and form of speech, may lead him into danger. Keep a steady guard upon his safety."

"I owe it to him," muttered the magistrate to himself, as his subordinate withdrew. "Molé's deep debt to the brother can thus be repaid."

CHAPTER IX.

"I AM bewildered, Langton ; beyond measure bewildered," remarked Napier to his friend, as they paced the streetway. "One word is dropped, and a light appears to guide us through this dark business : the next, and the light fades away, leaving us as we were."

"Your feeling is natural," answered Mr Langton ; "still we have gained something. Those men are here, *and for a purpose*, as M. Marcel says ; through the influence of taste and habit we may learn much. We have secured M. Marcel's active co-operation, —a great point : his skill is piqued, too, that is evident ; he will be, with his powerful means at hand, a most useful coadjutor. Wilton will play a desperate

game : he has resolute men to fool ; he is come to set his wits in competition with ours. Craft is less dangerous when it is practised in so daring a form."

Before Napier could reply they were joined by a dashing, fashionable man who accosted them with ease and vivacity.

" We were going to wait on you this morning, Monsieur D'Aigrigny," said Langton, " to requite the courtesy of your attentions. We are fortunate in encountering you."

" It will be my happiness to be your guide," replied M. D'Aigrigny, in fluent English ; " I am just now from a canter, and have been treated with a laugh, which has quite dispelled the morning's usual lassitude." Breaking off, he said suddenly, " Do you ever play, M. Napier,—of course you will follow the fashion : take my advice, never trust yourself to the doubling system ; I did so, no later than last night,—my intentions were divined ; the stakes limited ; and I was plucked of 10,000 francs ; but I will have my revenge."

The party had by this time reached the hotel of M. D'Aigrigny, when the latter did the honours of

his house with an air which intimated he was fully sensible of his own importance there. To his visitors it was strange, and to them a matter of surprise, that one who seemed so little alive to the existence of home-life should possess a residence wherein unusual care and taste were displayed. The saloon was a specimen of elegance and refinement seldom seen. Many works of art were gracefully reposing in some niche or appropriated stand,—flowers were fresh and blowing in alabaster vases,—articles of *virtu* and interest were scattered here and there with that peculiar arrangement which bespeaks proficiency of taste, and refined taste too, grouped in a manner which filled the eye, and would seem to say, “A lady’s hand has been busy here.”

“Come, Monsieur,” cried M. D’Aigrigny, “I will relieve you of your doubts;” he had followed Napier’s glance of surprise. “I perceive you are curious to learn how these things came into the residence of a gay bachelor, or perchance you think I am secretly an artist of no small taste, to blend nature and art in so fair a union; but it is not so; female skill alone recommends the salon to your

favour—Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny is the benefactress. She delights in poetry and music. My affections do not rest amongst Greek antiquities, though I remember rather to have envied 'Paris,' once in my life, the warm affection of his Helen!"

"Well, I am enlightened," answered Napier, with a laugh; "though I at first thought, I must confess, that you had secretly accepted the fate which is marked out for most of us,—that you were privately under the authority of female government."

"A victim to a system I professedly condemn, Monsieur!" was the rejoinder. "No, no!" he continued, as if in horror, "defend me from bonds indissoluble? Married! why then a man must take the beverage he mixes, even if he has used salt instead of sugar in the sweetening. Mon cher Napier, I hold to the Italian proverb,—“he who is weary of a quiet life gets himself a wife.”"

* * * *

At rather a late hour, Napier and his friend Langton entered the apartments of the British ambassador. Here the aristocracy, beauty, and *élite* of the gay capital were assembled. A crowded ball-room is a peculiar spectacle, especially when

the waltz is in full play, and the observer's ears are closed. Napier and his companion were shortly met by Lord Mainville, their host, who presented them to her ladyship. Great was his lordship's surprise as Lady Mainville rose and greeted Napier with cordiality: he smiled, and said:—

“Diplomacy had banished from his memory a fact which gave him pleasure to have revived. He was happy to remember that Mr Napier and her ladyship were no strangers,—and Mr Langton scarcely one either!”

On either hand of Lady Mainville, a lady of singular personal attraction was seated. It would have been a difficult point to decide which lady commanded the greatest interest and admiration from the many who hovered by. The one at the left of the Lady Mainville was Wilton's half-sister, the fair and lovely Livia D'Albani, the other, Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny, a lady of great personal attraction, delicacy, softness, and sensibility speaking in her fair face, and legibly stamped in every line; and there was a certain native dignity about her composed manner, which is not generally a characteristic of the fair Parisian.

Lady Mainville said, as Napier's glance rested on the latter lady, "This is my best companion, Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny, my dear friend," she added, smiling affectionately on the fair girl; "it affords me much pleasure to present Mr Napier to you; he was an object of interest to me in his youth." A slight flush overspread the calm countenance of Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny as she bent in acknowledgment of the introduction; and then, raising her eyes to Napier's, she said with a smile:—

"If I am not much mistaken, Mr Napier, we have met before this evening."

Napier appeared embarrassed, but replied, "Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny once seen could not readily be forgotten."

"I am not then deceived," was the remark, and a smile of pleasure bathed the fair girl's face with feeling, as she frankly extended her hand. "Yes," she said, seeing Lady Mainville's astonishment, "Mr Napier and I are friends; gratitude should ever exalt our sentiments above conventional restraint. You must learn, Lady Mainville, that Mr Napier has placed me under weighty obligation. On Monday afternoon, as Livia and I were

taking a drive, I requested our coachman to deliver a message to a pensioner of our house, as I could not trust André to do so, and the latter had charge of the horses. The boy must have irritated them, so my brother affirms ; but the youth contends that English horses will not learn French manners. Be this as it may, the animals became restive, and hearing a horse behind, broke away from their charge, and flew wildly with us towards the city. There was a bad descent before them, a bridge and corner impossible to clear without an accident. My friend and I were sadly alarmed, and were about to spring into the road, when we heard the rapid approach of an equestrian, who shouted to us to remain still. Before I could turn, the horseman flew by ; and as he passed, or rather as he galloped by the side of the runaway horses, he held his own steed with such courage and masterly judgment, that he checked their speed, and ultimately brought them to a stand. We were too much agitated to express our gratitude. The coachman had hastened to the spot ; our deliverer gave the horses to his care, and turning to us he bowed low and departed. There he stands,"

she cried with vivacity and feeling ; “ he is the gallant unknown, and I tender him my heartfelt thanks.”

“ And I,” answered a rich, sweet voice, and Livia D’Albani bent forward with an air of touching earnestness and grace, and added ; “ but for that courageous act we were hopelessly lost.”

Napier displayed some emotion as his eye rested on the speaker of these last words—the voice so soft and delicate ; that influence which touches the soul so powerfully, brought a flush to his cheek, unequivocal evidence of surprise. He was about to answer her, when she was at that moment led to the waltz by a gay cavalier, who had some time stood in waiting. A thoughtful shade clouded the open countenance of Napier as he bent to Mademoiselle D’Aigrigny and said :—

“ I have been rewarded far beyond my deserts. May I venture to inquire the name of your companion on that day ?”

“ She is my dear friend, Livia D’Albani, at present my guest ; once an old schoolfellow ; an Italian by birth—an Englishwoman at heart ; grave heads as well as gay ones yield homage to

her beauty and accomplishments ; she possesses the gift of song in perfection."

"I can well conceive so," answered Napier ; "I have seldom seen a more attractive person, or listened to a voice of such soft and earnest pathos."

A seat was void ; and as the waltz was at its height, Napier was requested to take the vacant chair, and he entered into a more general conversation with Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny, who was evidently pleased with his society.

Napier had not long been seated by Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny before she became aware of a change in his manner and voice. She had been interested in his conversation ; his frankness and good sense, advanced with courteous deference, was most pleasing ; but why of a sudden did he start and grow taciturn, and reply with evident abstraction of mind. She had almost expressed a hope that he was not suffering from indisposition, his intellectual, expressive countenance was so much perturbed. Reason indeed had he to feel the sterner passions assume ascendancy ; for, from out a group of loungers at the door-way, one man stood a little forward, and watched him narrowly with a

scornful, supercilious glance. Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny's eye had followed Napier's, when she observed quickly, "Do you know Mr Wilton?" and she looked concerned and uneasy as she put this question.

"I have that honour," answered Napier with almost bitter emphasis.

"My brother tells me he will shortly become a benedict," pursued the lady; "are you acquainted with the lady of his choice?"

"Whom may it be his pleasure to select? I am not in Mr Wilton's confidence."

"I have been informed her name is Neville, sister of that tall gentleman who stands at the end of the salon facing us," replied Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny, smiling kindly on her friend Livia, who was placed, during a pause in the waltz, near Napier. Napier started as his companion's words fell; his eye turned in the direction pointed out, and he then beheld William Neville withdrawing his glance from him. Livia D'Albani's eye had likewise followed Napier's. She had overheard her friend's words, his dubious reply, and now, from abstraction of mind or acute confusion,

Napier's gaze was on her as he hoarsely answered:—

“Believe it not, lady; believe it not; it is a false report,—false as the spirit of evil!”

At the instant, Livia D'Albani's countenance was suffused with a deep, burning flush, and then a faintness followed. She suddenly abandoned her partner, and sank upon a seat with her head bent low, as if she trusted thus to escape observation. Napier had risen,—he stood undecided and agitated. He had noticed Livia's manner, the glance of inquiry mingled with reproach, the sudden change as his last words fell; but as he knew not the source whence these evidences of confusion could arise, and utterly in the dark in reference to her connexion with Wilton, he concluded her behaviour attributable solely to giddiness or fatigue; therefore, bending to Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny, who had not seen all that Napier had, he said:—

“I fear your friend is indisposed—you see she has quitted her place in the waltz.” The lady immediately rose from her seat, and placed herself by her friend's side.

A gentleman was bending over her, evidently

expressing his 'regrets, &c. He drew back, with a flushed cheek, as Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny said :—

“ You can quit us now, Alphonse, Livia is under my care ! ”

There was something in this beyond Napier's acumen. He was about to withdraw, when his former companion said :—

“ She must have considered an explanation necessary. Sisters exercise an arbitrary authority, Mr Napier : this cavalier, who has fairly acquitted himself in the waltz, which has over-tried my poor friend here, is my second brother, Alphonse D'Aigrigny.”

Napier turned to the individual thus alluded to, and perceived he was younger by some years than his companion of the morning,—a man of singularly gentlemanly appearance, with nothing of the *hautew* and dash which characterized the bearing of the elder D'Aigrigny. He was a masculine likeness of the sister ; on the pale brow, there was stamped intellectuality, and genius shone vividly in the dark restless eye. But the expression of the face was not good, not naturally candid ; though its worldly

covering, the exterior mantle, was, of course, refined and insinuating.

Napier felt the awkwardness of his situation, and resolved to withdraw ; besides he wished to breathe the fresh air—he was sick at heart and troubled. He took a grave adieu of the ladies by him, and said to M. Alphonse :—

“ Will you take a turn on the balcony with me ? ”

A ready assent was given, and Napier wended his way through the salon with his new acquaintance.

Napier's reception by Lady Mainville ; the progress he had made in the favour of one so select and courted as Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny ; the pre-eminent stamp of manliness and grace of carriage, uniting dignity of air with his intellectual caste of manly beauty, rendered him an object of no small interest to a group of loungers at the end of the apartment.

“ A noble bearing and fine countenance ; no Almack exotic that ; he would make a splendid soldier,” observed the Count Molé (a nobleman of high character, wearing the uniform of a general of cavalry), who had just joined the circle as Napier passed ; and he followed him with his eye.

"Much smitten yonder?" said Mr Wilton, pointing with significant gesture to Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny.

The proud noble's brow contracted, and he looked as though he was inclined to resent so marked an allusion to the lady of his love (for Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny was the betrothed of the Count Molé), but he contented himself by saying, with emphasis:

"Mr Wilton's delicacy rivals his penetration." A titter ran round the circle, for most knew the man so addressed; and though he was what is termed a popular person in society, from his being superior in ability to most, they had no objection to hear him snubbed.

"Who will give me that gentleman's name?" continued Count Molé, looking round him. "Surely I have seen him somewhere."

"His name is Napier," answered Wilton, with assumed indifference; thus resolving, it would seem, to carry off his annoyance.—"My most esteemed friend," he added, with a supercilious smile.

"Are you indeed so honoured?" was Count Molé's reply, uttered in a way which expressed doubt. "I must know this Mr Napier, if he is related to one of his name, who once rendered me

inestimable service.”—And his glance rested on Wilton as he spoke.—“Can *you* give me this information? *You* ought to know something of the man to whom I allude.”

“*You* should know,” answered Wilton with indifference, “that in the world friends come and go; the fancy that won may deprive us of them. So it may be in regard to Mr Napier’s feelings for me, for he is *gauche*.”

“So Mr Wilton has found him,” interrupted an individual at Wilton’s elbow, taking him up shortly in his allusion to his friend.

Mr Wilton faced about to retort upon the person who had thus spoken, but meeting Langton’s stern cold glance, he hesitated, when Count Molé extended his hand, and cried: “Well met, Mr Langton; the duties of my profession have held me in durance these last forty-eight hours, or I should have found you out, and done honour to my worthy uncle’s introduction: Shall we take a turn round the salon?”

Wilton had heard words of import. “To what good, to what evil, does this union tend?” was his idea. He was interrupted in his surmises by,—

"Could Mr Wilton inform me, if this gentleman, who has been the subject of conversation, and whose name is Napier, is in any way related to an individual of that name who visited Paris some months ago, and was I think on terms of familiar intimacy with Mr Wilton?"

"He is a brother, Monsieur Marcel," answered Wilton, with a deferential smile and manner, as if he felt pleasure in rendering information to so powerful a personage. "I commit him to your guardianship; such an object of general interest will require your parental watchfulness!"

M. Marcel bowed low, as if in acknowledgment of the compliment.

Napier did not remain long absent from the salon; he re-entered it, accompanied by Alphonse D'Aigrigny. A band of Italian professionals had just commenced a rare performance. The two young men paused in the centre of the room. Italian singing, when the art is perfected, is a high treat; it is the essence, the soul, the flower of music. Its life, its enjoyment, is so volatile—for it is gone even whilst the influence entrances,—that it leaves a sudden, pure, and rare impression on the

sensibilities—not of pleasure, nor of sadness exactly ; a compound of both—almost a divine influence. The authority of song exalts the mind to a consciousness of its own divinity, suggesting and realizing the formless wish, as thoughts will, when in reverie they wander too far to be distinct even to ourselves.

When the performance had finished, and the stillness was broken which follows an intellectual treat, Napier and his companion slowly proceeded on their way to the anteroom. On leaving the salon, as a quadrille was forming, Napier's glance chanced to wander to the head of the apartment, when he perceived Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny's eye upon him, and her countenance evinced apprehension and uneasiness. It struck Napier as peculiar. Years afterward he recalled the circumstance, and understood it well,—and, at the same time, she whispered to the individual who had been introduced to him by Mr Langton as the Count Molé. Having procured their hats and cloaks, they were about to withdraw, when the elder D'Aigrigny lounged into the anteroom, and said, with a not over friendly recognition of his brother :—

“ Ah ! Napier, you no doubt feel with me ; it will

be somewhat *triste* here after that fine display of artistic skill. I am going to seek for a little amusement elsewhere. What say you, will you pass an hour under my protection? Novelty, when it does not fly in your face and scratch you, is always charming."

"Thanks," answered Napier, "for your good intentions, but I must forego the treat so enticingly tendered. I wish to return to my hotel."

"Misfortunes seldom come alone; see how it pours," referring to the weather; and, as if he had altered his plans, he re-entered the salon. Napier was hesitating whether he should wait a little for the weather to abate, and Alphonse D'Aigrigny was amusing him by some sportive allusions to the gay scene beyond, of which they had a distant view, when they were joined by M. Marcel, who barely acknowledged Napier's salutation; but as he bent to take his cloak, he said, in a tone of voice, evidently meant for Napier's ear only:—

"Mistrust a stranger, Mr Napier, when he is lavish of his attentions."

Napier hardly knew how to take the hint. Could it refer to the elder D'Aigrigny, who had just left

him ; or to the individual at his side, who seemed to attach himself particularly to him. He thought M. Marcel must allude to the absent man, for Napier was favourably impressed with the bearing and appearance of his present companion : still he knew he was compassed round with difficulties, and that, in deciding on the character of his acquaintances, he should be influenced by sagacity and discernment, not sympathy. But Napier's was not a mistrustful disposition ; he was not one of those who thought

“ That trust reposed should be preserved to smite
The fool whose heart has been exposed to you.”

“ Mistrust a stranger, when he is lavish of his attentions.” A sound doctrine, no doubt, thought Napier,—and he had a great respect for M. Marcel's penetration. The elder D'Aigrigny had pretty plainly displayed his taste ; he would see if his companion's was the same. Acting on the impulse, he said to Alphonse D'Aigrigny : “ These late reunions, to which your brother indirectly alluded, are they attractive ? ”

“ I seldom join them,” was the answer, uttered

carelessly : it is a promiscuous assembly, attracted by a tune as seductive as dangerous."

" Which is — ? "

" The rattle of the dice-box," was the rejoinder.

" Are they public or private assemblies ? "

" Both ; the latter perhaps the most dangerous, for reserve is sooner overcome when a man is surrounded by *friends* only," replied D'Aigrigny : " as for the former, I could describe their true character in two words."

" They must be powerful ones then. What may be your opinion of these public re-unions ? "

" This : in spite of the feasting, music, and masquerade, or taking these as lures and adornment, they are nothing more or less than ' decorated hells.' "

" Then you are not a votary ? "

" I am a poor younger son," answered Alphonse D'Aigrigny, " and have felt the folly of affecting what I cannot afford. A light purse checks extravagant tastes, even if the fancy leans to indulgence." This he said lightly ; but assuming a more serious tone, he added : " Being partial to literary pursuits, I am more indifferent about my scanty means

than I should be, if I possessed the tastes only of ordinary society. In the field of literature, M. Napier, we soon learn to suppress the feelings of jealousy and annoyance, which arise in the vulgar bosom from fancied misfortune, and to forget the pressure even of poverty. To want little is true philosophy, for small things are great to an expanded intellect. Wealth takes wings to itself and flies away, but intellectual possessions have a permanent rest—a lasting home. What fortune gives is not so based. I do not, however, say we should despise wealth; far from it; but as I do not possess it, I fortify my mind with these principles, and believe, that in thus holding a steady command over my inclinations, I abstract myself from the authority of discontent.”

Suspicion vanished from Napier’s mind, for these remarks were made with candour and seeming sincerity.

“It must have been the elder D’Aigrigny, to whom M. Marcel had alluded,” thought Napier; and he marked him down as one whom he would mistrust. But of the individual by his side—possessing tastes not dissimilar to his own—he felt

the best inclination to cultivate an acquaintance so agreeably commenced ; and, at parting, Monsieur Alphonse assured him, it would be his passion, his delight, to be esteemed his *cher ami*.

CHAPTER X.

"WELL, I think affairs are in good train," remarked Mr. Wilton to his companion, William Neville, as these two individuals met at their breakfast table the morning after the ball at the ambassador's; "I have set a machine in motion at last; we can lie upon our oars now, for we have breathing time."

"To what machine do you allude? speak plainly; I detest enigmas," said Neville, moodily.

"Love, man, love!" was the answer, "brought about by a delicate manœuvre of mine, aided by the fair handmaid of passion, 'Curiosity.'"

"When you condescend to be plain-spoken I will listen to you," remarked William Neville, possessing himself of a newspaper.

Wilton eyed his companion keenly, and then said :—

“ Well, I will enlighten you to your own taste. Did you notice how quietly Napier settled himself to those two girls? Did you observe what passed? I think you must, for your eyes were scarcely off him for a moment. He did not talk to Livia, but he looked at her; and right earnestly too: his companion had his words, but the other had his eyes and his thoughts. Livia’s beauty was the first thing that attracted him, and then ‘curiosity’ kept her before his mind. I will tell you how this was brought about. In a note I wrote Livia, a few days ago, I hinted, that if she met Mr Napier in the society of the D’Aigrignays, she must be on her guard, for that I was no favourite of his, nor he of mine. This hint of course made her curious; she had heard him lauded for his talent and accomplishments; and somehow, he has, I have heard, rendered her and the other girl some service. She presumed to question me, in reply to my note yesterday, about my misunderstanding with Napier, but I silenced her at once, by saying, ‘I did not wish to influence her *likings*; I only referred to my

dislike to explain the reason of the coldness between us.' Thus, you see, she became very suddenly brought to *think* about him, and this blending with the service he had done her, invested him with a kind of romance which forged the first of the links of that curious chain which binds two hearts together, and naturally led to that indescribable *something* in her manner towards him which perplexed and flattered him at the same time. A varying tint on the cheek,—a tremulous voice, and the averted eye, we know, Neville,—

'Trifles such as these
To serious mischiefs lead.'

Thus, I saw the manner of the one mystified the other, and I opine that both of them will find it difficult to disentangle the effect from the cause which has brought it about,—namely, 'curiosity;' a sort of plastic, sensible image, Neville; capable of influencing the imagination in a very singular way. Do you understand me now?

"Confound it, Wilton," Neville cried, suddenly rousing himself, "she declined to dance with me, without ascribing a reason either."

Wilton smiled slightly.

Neville then remarked, " But Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny will frustrate all your plans ; for, of course, she is aware of your connexion with Livia."

" Never fear, Neville, never fear, we shall manage very well. Pauline D'Aigrigny will tolerate me, for the sake of her friend. I shall succeed in my undertaking. I don't fear the D'Aigrignys a whit. I can manage the men easy enough, at least one of them." After a brief pause, he added—" About Langton, he has sided with Napier now, and no mistake : he was less chary than usual last night,—he has declared himself. I saw the glance that he favoured me with at Oxford ; at present I cannot afford an open rupture, but the time may come when I may find it serviceable to do so."

William Neville made no reply,—there was more than met the sight in his dogged manner and evident ill-humour. Wilton saw all this,—he had talked against time, thinking so to undermine his companion's reserve ; now he hesitated, apparently uncertain how to proceed : at last, he remarked, carelessly : " I shall start for England to-night,

Neville: What in the devil's name takes Armstrong to England? And, by the by, that letter you promised me, have you got it ready?"

Neville had been carelessly scanning a newspaper; but as Wilton put the last question, his eyes were raised to his companion's face, and he said steadily:—

"*That* letter is not ready, nor will it be,—I must have some chat with you."

Wilton fixed a cool searching glance on Neville's face; then he inspected the impression on the wax—he had just sealed a note which he had written whilst talking—with the utmost *sang froid*, walked across the room, and closed the door of the apartment, observing, as he returned to the table:—

"I can spare you ten minutes, Neville; business has to be done,—*our* business, since I have now just determined to run over to England, so that more than the time mentioned is not at my disposal."

"You ask me," rejoined his companion, "if that letter is ready,—I answer, No. And I tell you, if you have not perceived it, that I have a repugnance to commit so villanous a deed."

"Ha! is it so?" echoed Wilton in a low stern

voice, his face livid from a sudden gust of passion.

"Is the lesson still unlearned? Are you losing your senses again? Do you possess no keener instinct than that which gives care only to the present?"

"I possess an instinct which causes me to shudder at the idea of performing so unnatural an act.—Are there no other means," cried Neville, earnestly, "that can rescue me from the thralldom of so tyrannical an authority?"

"None," was the stern rejoinder: "I will use you to win your sister's hand; then I will resign my authority, but not till then."

"I tell you, it is not in my power to surmount so vast a difficulty, if I laboured to do so. My father would arm the law against us, and you know Ellen's opinion of you—Wilton, it cannot be;" and Neville turned away as he spoke, resolving to leave the room.

"Stop! stop! my good friend," said Wilton, himself again; "not so fast, pray. You are a poor philosopher, or you would preserve a more discreet manner, and not prove to me how much you feel my authority, as you call it. Well, granted I have an authority over you; I tell you it

will be the arrogance of folly on your part to think I will resign it. Defy me ! and the consequences are not beyond your foresight, I presume ? The bond must be redeemed, Neville, in spite of your antipathy to fulfil your part of the work. Have you aught more to say ?”

“ Yes !” answered William Neville, returning to the table at which Wilton sat ; “ since you seek my thoughts, you shall have them ; and I tell you, that I am resolved to free myself from the degrading position into which you have thrust me. I will be your tool no longer. My thoughts are embittered, my pleasures are poisoned, through the tax you impose upon me. Why should you hold my body and soul in captivity ?—It shall be so no longer.—Beware, Wilton, beware ! or by the hell you have created within me, I will in some way take sharp and sudden interest for your account with me ;” and having worked himself into a passion, he turned fiercely on his companion.

“ Go on, my good friend,” said Wilton, winding his watch ; “ it were pity I should check you in your high flights. The fashion of your countenance, and your gestures, are quite correspond-

ent and becoming, considering the relation in which we stand to each other ! Pray continue,—I see you are anxious to do so ; you cannot help speaking plainly ; and you know I rather like thoroughly to see into the mind of the man, with whom I have immediate and pressing business to transact.”

“ I will be plain,” retorted Neville, roused as his companion had never seen him before ; “ yet I do not mean to reproach you for the disgrace which attaches itself to my character. I have crossed the chasm between the fair and foul of life ; but I do not say that it was your hand that guided my steps across it, nor that you have brought about my ruin, through an early and cruel exercise of a false and faithless interest.—No ; the work is completed. Reproach is vain when chance of remedy and cure has passed. I do not say, Wilton,” continued Neville, speaking bitterly and hoarsely, “ that when I was a neglected, reckless, thoughtless boy, you lured me on to indulge in tastes and acquire habits which soon undermined all principles of integrity and honour.—No ; your sneer answers me. I feel as you, that if this points to penitence on my part, it has come too late—that a character like mine can-

not be remodelled by a few empty words. Still I am not a thoroughly hardened villain ; for I am at times stricken by a terror of mind which can be only dissipated through intoxication. I do not tax you solely as the cause of these miserable results of intemperance and evil.—No ; but I do charge you with exercising an influence which has been obtained through a base and treacherous plot against me,—a plot planned with fiendish art, and prosecuted with unrelenting cruelty. This I have long endured : whilst self only was affected, I have been pliant to your will, and I am still prepared to be borne onward in the turbulent stream of our closely-mingled destinies, if you will cease to prosecute your unnatural purpose.”

Neville paused for a few moments, and when he again spake his voice was uneven, and his lip quivered. “Wilton,” he said, “you have damned my prospects, ensnared my honour, divided my wealth, and made me the thing I am ; but there is still a something left which I would hold sacred from you. I have lost home, honour, happiness,—all that could render life a blessing is gone, and I am all but hardened. I should have been so long before this,

but for the earnest pleadings of a sister's love. Let me preserve this treasure : let it remain undefiled, Wilton. It is protected now : it rests in innocence, sheltered by a parent's heart from which I have long been alienated. This is all I ask : grant me this boon and I will be your friend. Let Ellen rest in peace, or rather in the purity of sorrow which she experiences from the degradation and dishonour attached to her brother's name."

He had ended : he stood as one supplicating a boon, with an intensity of concern which proved how much he felt on the subject. It was a strange spectacle, scarcely to be realized. These two men, who in society were the life of a set, worldly, accomplished, experienced, and acute ; together now, how different the position ! In the world they were called " the inseparables ;" together now, how widely apart ! The one goaded almost to madness, through the indignities he was compelled to bear ; the other conning over all that had been said, and plotting in his crafty mind how he could best ensure the successful workings of his malevolence. At first Wilton was evidently startled at the tone of Neville's address. At first, it seemed, he had re-

solved to reason calmly with his companion, for his countenance wore a serious, thoughtful air ; but this idea was dismissed, for a sarcastic smile played upon his thin lip, and there was malice in the eye, as he said :—

“ Your preface was far from complimentary, my dear Neville ; and your subsequent rhetoric neither classically nor comprehensively treated. You have talked a great deal without my being able to discern your purpose ; for in giving so clear a history of your life, and censuring your own irregularities, you seem to think it possible that I may be under some misconception on so pleasing and interesting a subject. Your youth was none of the purest. Man, 'twould have been a Herculean task to have made you in disposition other than you are.’ Ask D’Aigrigny if you have more than creditably fathered the boy. I found you a rough specimen of our school, and, like an able statuary, moulded you into becoming shape. William Neville is known by his step ; his assurance goes for high-breeding : his bearing causes many a fair bosom to throb with ardour and interest : in fact he is so skilled, that the most clever, old Lavater himself, would not detect the

lack of ability and breeding, and so on, though he prated by the hour; and yet for all this he is ungrateful. I see I have made a mistake," he continued, still speaking sarcastically. "We are all naturally credulous in our own favour; and you have so often caressed and lauded me for my cleverness, and so on, that I was ready at last to believe I was all you thought me, and quite worthy of the honour you once had a fancy to bestow upon me. But this is all idle work," he said, rising to his feet; "what I say now has meaning, and it will be well for you to heed me. I would remind you, William Neville, of the things you know, and may reflection teach you wisdom. Talk not to me of the world,—I scorn it. 'The world' has always sold its soul for mammon, and pilfered life of its best ornament,—the fawning, cringing hypocrite,—to pander to the purse-proud fool. Enough, I know it well. I am content to stand alone; but you must learn that the man so situated is wedded to his purpose with a jealous love. I have one end and being in life, and my resolution is fixed and fortified to its fulfilment. Neville, I have a love for life; but I would sacrifice it rather

than live with a changed mind and purpose. I cannot and will not retrace one step: forward we must go; to falter now would be worse than madness. Napier is on the trail, Neville. The secret police are narrowly observing us. I can understand Marcel's cunning—Molé's vengeance! Pause! can you dare think so?—No; Napier's attention must be withdrawn either through my success at Mowbray, or through the influence of an attraction here."

He paused for a short space, and then said in his old vein, half-jokingly, half-satirically: "We have work to do, but if you find your position monotonous, I will point out an agreeable way of relieving it. Turn your attention to Julia Stanley's blue eyes; they bespake their admiration pretty plainly last night as you whirled round in the waltz. The young lady, when I managed to turn the conversation on you, sighed in approved fashion, and, with her eyes upon the bracelet on her rounded arm, lisped that your waltzing was heaven, &c.; and the old general, too, was particular about your rent-roll. He held me fully five minutes by the button during that tender shawling affair in the anteroom. Now

there is occupation for you ; leave the heavier matters to me. Write this one letter,—I ask no more. Believe me, Neville," he concluded with apparent sincerity, " we cannot recede. I must stand fair at Mowbray : you secure Stanley's daughter and her dowry, then matters will go well with us."

* * * * *

" Bah !" muttered Wilton as Neville left the room, persuaded, it seemed, of the necessity of following his friend's orders—" to think he could circumvent my plans ! The Stanley bait took. Vain fool ! his anger melted like wax before the fire at the hint. Better tickle the ear of a fool than reason against a prejudice he takes up. Still I hardly thought the pill would require to be gilded yet !"

He relapsed into a brooding reverie ; he felt what he had said : there could be no standing still. One evil act presses on the life of peace ; one evil plot,—one wicked scheme begets another, adding fuel to the fire which the troubled conscience kindles.

CHAPTER XI.

THE first shades of evening hung gloomily on the valley as the sun with a lurid glare sank beyond the hill-boundary of the Park of Mowbray. Without the mansion, it was a sombre and dreary scene. The cold winds hurtled through the domain, and the lowering aspect of the clouds presaged storms. Within, the sad cause of sorrow was unrelieved,—disquietude existed still. Those fetters which enslaved the minds of the inmates of this residence were far from being broken. At Ellen Neville's solicitation, Inez Napier had been removed to Mowbray. It was thought the slight change might be beneficial to her; for since Napier and Langton's departure she had relapsed into her former spiritless condition. With melancholy, de-

bility and languor returned ; she moved about in loneliness and reverie ; at times unconscious of things around her, and of the delicate and feeling attentions of one, whose sympathy and care were displayed with all of friendship, disinterested zeal, and watchfulness. When Ellen sought to soothe the mind of her guest, Inez would lay her head upon her kind companion's shoulder and say, in a manner that brought tears to Ellen's eyes, " Dear one, you cannot realize the disorder and confusion within me ; the pang which such suspense inflicts cannot be conceived, unless it has been felt." Ellen could have said, " There was little for her to dwell upon that could soothe or comfort,—that she bore about her a fear of disgrace and danger to those she truly loved, and a presentiment that every early hope would be a part of a general wreck ;" but this would have been a selfish rejoinder ; besides, things had come to light, or rather suspicion had almost grown into reality, that a disclosure would be made that must, in a social sense, dis sever that friendly union with her she loved ; therefore the *effect* of consolation upon Ellen, when spoken by her to Inez, were alarm and personal affright.

This day had been one of increased uneasiness at Mowbray. Mr Wilmott had arrived from Vallis with a newspaper that contained a paragraph touching on a projected marriage between William Neville and "the beautiful and accomplished daughter of General Stanley." Circumstances connected with William Neville made this a very serious affair,—a matter of grave importance; if even but a rumour, it must be suppressed. Still he could not explain his reasons; he could only hope to obtain Colonel Neville's interference on the grounds of the grave position in which his son stood in regard to his evident connexion with the strange disappearance of Henry Napier. Mr Wilmott was shocked to see how bitterly his sense of an imperative duty was resisted by Colonel Neville. The pride of the old man, though rudely shaken, was not yet obliterated. He had not the moral strength to cope with this humiliating duty. Mr Wilmott left him bowed down with grief, and quite incapable of deciding on the course he should pursue. The affair could not remain in this position. Mr Wilmott sought Ellen, and disclosed the nature of his errand, in-

timating the necessity of prompt interference. Ellen was greatly agitated. Should a relative step forward to protect a stranger from one whom, in spite of his errors, she loved still? In the midst of these thoughts, Fanny Churchhill's injuries stood frowning by, and Ellen's heart yearned towards her. But Mr Wilmott had spoken very firmly :—"Virtue," he had said, "must be the guide, the principle, the ground-plan of action, if we would deserve success. The love for a relative is but a snare, unless honour and virtue exalt it above the influence of a dangerous impulse." Ellen sought time for reflection. An hour elapsed, and she returned to Mr Wilmott with a mien which showed she had fortified her mind to the required duty. With a grave voice she said :—"I will do as you desire ; though I subject my brother to mortification, I trust the feeling will be transient."

Ellen Neville deeply mourned the necessity of this step, but her resolution was unchanged. For the remainder of the afternoon she confined herself to her room to perform her self-imposed and painful task. Having completed her letter, which was to be intrusted to Mr Langton, another sheet

was now drawn to her : over it she bent long and mournfully ; at last she wrote, and as she did so, bitter tears could not be suppressed ; her hand trembled,—many words were all but indistinct ; she paused often in this labour. The first shades of night had drawn on, and dropped with a silent hand a gloom within her apartment, before Ellen's labour was accomplished. Then she remained in reverie, her head resting on her hand. The door of her apartment opened, and a soft step glided towards her, and a gentle voice said, as the intruder pressed a kiss on her brow :—

“ Letters, dear love ; here are two I have brought for you.”

Ellen started ; she seemed afraid to touch them. At length she noted the address of one, and the pale cheek was suddenly suffused with a deep crimson glow. The eye of Inez was bent feelingly upon her : “ And is it thus, dear one ? ” she said softly. “ May God bless you in your love ; ” and again pressing a kiss upon the still glowing cheek, she turned away. Ellen broke the seal,—they were Napier's words she gazed upon. He spoke to her of his deep love in manly frankness and sim-

plicity, with such an all-prevailing spirit of truth, that the warm sympathies of the woman-nature were excited. For a moment memory was still, and nature revelled in delight. A blessing on him trembled on her lip as she paused, laying the sheet before her, and sat with uplifted eye, seemingly questioning a higher power whether what he prayed for could be. Then she read on, and every line assured her of his sincerity. Words were there that spake of hope and future happiness; but before she had reached the end, she was compelled to see that there was unhappiness in the writer's mind,—that he was oppressed with some sorrow beyond what appeared, and the bloom faded from her cheek. Again the letter was laid down, but the eye was not upturned now, it rested pensively upon the words that charmed; and yet a quivering was about the lip. Shortly her glance was fixed on that unopened missive which accompanied the one which had affected her so sensitively; in a breath all pure train of thought vanished,—it was in her brother's hand. With nervous haste she sought to glean its import; almost the first words shocked her. They spoke of Napier, slightly of

him whom she trusted with deep faith, dwelling in a light, careless strain on a flirtation between him and a certain Livia D'Albani, a star of the first magnitude in the gay circles of haut-ton. She glanced from these innuendoes to the letter Napier had addressed to her, with the confidence one would apply to a tried friend, when surrounded with the clamour of artful enemies. It was enough—truth was stamped upon his letter; *her* faith in him vindicated *his* honour. There was a glow of indignation on her brow as she continued her task; suddenly she sprang from her seat, crying with a wild impassioned energy, unnoticing the start of astonishment which Inez gave:—"I see it, I see it all. Base, base and disgraceful thought! I—I be Wilton's wife!—No, never;" and her fingers stiffened as if she had unexpectedly touched some loathsome thing, and the letter fell to the ground.

Though scarcely less self-possessed than her friend, Inez drew near and wound her arms around her:—

"What is this you say?" she cried—"Is the curse come?—Ellen, dear Ellen! it must never be!" and Inez strove to catch her eye, to kiss her cheek,

to prove by some endearing act the strength of her warm sympathy; but all was unheeded. The gentle, tender Ellen had towered into the stern, indignant woman. At length she said:—

“It is thus a brother requites a sister’s love and tender interest. My heart! barren and worthless have all thy hopes been. ‘This secret,’ she said, unheeding Inez Napier’s cry of fear, ‘involving the family name!’ Thus does he bargain. How selfish and dastardly is the evil heart! ‘Mr Wilton comes—he comes this night to receive my answer.’—Am I dreaming, or have I heard of this before?” And as the pleading face of Inez came upon her sight, she continued: “True, Inez, true,—I remember now—you once told me how I should be situated. ‘Family honour! My brother’s life rests on my decision.’” She again paused; no language could depict the horror, the alarmed expression of the countenance.

Inez clung to her, prayed her to be calm, with the most soothing, earnest argument. Their positions seemed changed—Inez pleaded so forcibly, and with such acute feeling, that her language reached the shocked and horrified spirit. Gradually Ellen recovered her reason, and then her head

sank upon her friend's shoulder, and tears came to her relief. Their tears mingled, and then, with one accord, these sorely tried and afflicted beings sank upon their knees, and petitioned Heaven for strength and fortitude to meet their fate with becoming resignation. Ellen was the first to speak.

"I must see this man. Courage, my heart! there is a stern task before me."

"Let me confront him for you," cried Inez, feelingly; "for your sake, I could do much, dear Ellen: though I am so weak and fragile, I am sure I could dare even this man in his wrath to serve you."

They had approached the window; opening the casement, Ellen leant forward to catch the cool air of evening, for her temples were burning: large drops of rain fell, and lightning illuminated the eastern horizon. Ellen was on the point of closing the window, when she fancied she heard the quick tread of a horse; and, before she had time to speculate, the dim outline of an equestrian was perceptible on the avenue. The horseman rapidly approached; he reined up his steed by the porter's lodge, and sprang to the ground. Ellen knew the

form of the new comer well ; she closed the window hastily, and, turning to Inez, said with alarm :

“ Oh ! what brings him from Paris, and to Mowbray, too, on such a night ! ”

Inez had fainted ; her heart was ever on the watch. No wonder, then, that the shock and the surprise from the presence of that horseman, robbed her of her little strength, and left her in Ellen's arms bereft it seemed of life. Gently bearing her drooping friend's form to a seat, Ellen resorted to remedial measures : she was partially successful, when a servant entered and delivered a message to her mistress. Ellen made no reply, but hid her agitated countenance from observation, as she continued to apply restoratives to Inez. At last her labours were attended with success. Inez became conscious of the cause of her indisposition, and whispered,—

“ Go to him, Ellen ; go to him. And oh ! if there be any intelligence, hasten to me. ”

Ellen left the room, silently possessing herself of her brother's letter. On her way to the library, she stopped more than once, from sheer inability to proceed. At last her hand rested on the lock ; with

difficulty she opened the door, then stood motionless: a hasty step advanced, and, before she had time to think, her head rested on Charles Napier's bosom, and her ear caught the exclamation—"Thank God, beloved, we have met!"

With a deep sigh, Ellen withdrew from Napier's embrace. The hand he held in his grasp trembled violently. With a vast effort, she regained partial composure: her full liquid eye, fraught with deep measure of concern, sought his, as she said:—

"Tell me, in mercy, Charles, the cause of this most unexpected visit."

"I have returned for two reasons, dear Ellen," he answered, gazing on her with passionate tenderness, "one of which I am compelled to conceal from you. The other, Ellen," and his voice trembled as he spoke,—“is to hear from your lips a contradiction of the horrible report which is rife in Paris concerning you.”

Ellen was much agitated. She essayed, but could not speak: she would have sunk upon the floor, had not a faithful arm supported her. As Napier held her thus, he cried, in a voice of acute emotion and tenderness:—

“ Ellen, I have loved you, God knows how long, with an unchangeable and an unwavering heart ; from the hours we rambled together in the woods around, my boyish devotion has lived. In that early day you were the interest and acting influence over my young mind ; each spot was rendered beautiful through your presence ; the air was sweeter when you were near ; the birds’ song of more winning melody. So it was, Ellen ; and my young heart treasured up a word of kindness, and throbbed with fervent attachment, before you knew aught of the existence or nature of the emotions you had inspired. Thus I lived,—thus did your presence affect me,—living within me in my young day as simple and innocent sympathy, and now as the master-passion and ambition of my soul. You hear me, dear one,” he said, bending down, as he tenderly placed her in a chair ; “ you cannot doubt my sincerity. I have given you all,—beyond you there is no happiness in this life for me. Still, Ellen, so unselfish is my love, that I could resign you to another, if I felt sure that he was all that I feel I could be to you ; but, Ellen, a tale has met my ear which no tongue can cor-

roborate but your own,—a word, and you can satisfy me for ever. As I am true to you, I feel that you will be so with me: then tell me what means the connexion of your name with Wilton?—in mercy answer me?" He paused, hanging over the trembling girl, as if more than life depended on her words.

"Oh! this is horrible," said Ellen, with faltering accents; and then she gazed wistfully into Napier's face, and cried with a voice that acutely affected him:—

"Charles, I too have dreamt! Nay, hear me, your true heart deserves my entire confidence,—I, too, have loved,—and had this disclosure come a year ago, or as long a time back as memory of our intercourse can date, I should have answered you as now. But now,—I speak without reserve, my very boldness springs from my despair,—there is *no hope for us!*" Shading her eyes to exclude Napier's sorrow from them, she continued, in a low hoarse voice, "You ask for an explanation of that dread rumour," and she exposed to his view the concluding part of her brother's letter, referring to Wilton and his claim. Napier gazed as if some

horrid phantom had met his eye. There are some sudden shocks so bitter that reason is quite overpowered, sympathy and sensibility at once blighted. For some minutes a silence of inexpressible agony prevailed : at last, Napier hoarsely whispered,—

“ Oh Heaven ! what does this forebode ? ”

“ Charles, is it necessary for me to explain ? ” Ellen cried, in tones of bitter anguish. “ Oh ! why have you come hither ? Why increase my misery by showing me that you share my troubles with me, though we must be separate ? What does it forebode ? Ask your own reason. Oh ! does it not forebode shame, terror, and misery,—disgrace to our name, outrage to innocence,—and an eternal separation between your family and mine ? ”

Napier’s mind was cruelly agitated ; he could not reflect ; he had not done so with any degree of calmness since he had heard the rumour which connected the name of her he so deeply loved with that of his bitter enemy. Had he considered with a mind less disturbed, he would have paused before he had taken this last step. There was,—though he would not recognise the fact,—a stern contention going on within him, a struggle between sym-

pathy and reason, the former influence drawing him more closely still, in the hour of trial, to the dear object of his affections; the latter opening upon an affrighted sense the necessity of relinquishing hopes which had been and were, as he had sadly assured Ellen, the master-passion and ambition of his soul.

"I am not less agitated than yourself, Ellen," he said slowly, an expression of deep uneasiness taking the place of his before impassioned sorrow. "I partly comprehend your meaning"—he had reached thus far when the door of the apartment opened, and Colonel Neville, with bent form and feeble step, entered, looking wistfully about him. There was an apathy and dejection in the old man's face which was sad to see. Vigour and mental resource seemed lost to a mind, or almost so, that had once been so powerful and luminous. As her father stood gazing around him with a wandering eye, Ellen's soul was in a moment free of all personal thought, and with him solely. She sprang forward, and, winding her arms around him, cried, "Do you not recognise me, father?—and Mr Napier, too—he is here—there he stands!—Do you not perceive him?"

Napier drew near, with some degree of calmness, and took his old friend's hand, and spoke some words to comfort him. At the sound of his voice, the old man's head was advanced, his lips parted, and his frame shook convulsively.

"Do you come *here* to search for him?" he said with a wild ghastly stare.—"He is not here. I swear he is not!—He has never been near his father's heart,—he knows not that her father owns him?"

Napier shuddered, and Ellen veiled her eyes in fear and consternation.—Was that rich mind overthrown? Alas! it was on the verge of being so.

"Ellen, you know, he is not here," he again said, dwelling on some sad hallucination.—"Tell him so, or I shall go mad. Perform your duty, child, and protect your brother from the hangman's gripe. That woman! That dread woman, that broke upon my lonely stroll of yesterday, blended with a host of harsh upbraidings the stern fact, that he would be arrested as a murderer at my hall-door. It is a lie. I exiled the *child* from his paternal roof, how can the *man* be here?" So speaking, he sank upon a chair, and his head fell upon his hands. Napier heard Ellen's partially stifled sobs, as she

stood over her parent. He *felt* he must withdraw. The few dark dread words which had fallen recalled him to reason. Still he must speak; and he advanced to do so, when Ellen drew near to him, and looking into his face with a meaning he could not misunderstand, she said:—"This has been a bitter hour, its bitterness has sunk to the depths of my being: I have never seen my father agitated thus before. To whom he alludes I know not; at least you perceive the bent of his fears. Charles, farewell! A fiery trial awaits us. God bless you!" Her voice was scarcely above a whisper, so intense was her agitation; but, as Napier was about to speak, she summoned strength to say with partial firmness, "Not a word—my soul is there!" Her hand pointed to, and her eye rested on, her dear father. The tender, earnest, and concerned gaze caused a glow of interest to overspread the pallid cheek, and to tint it with so pure an expression of devotion that one would believe the child's duty could beguile the woman's heart into a forgetfulness of its own trials and sorrows.

* * * *

In the passage, Napier encountered Inez, whose countenance, as he approached her, betrayed unqualified and acute concern and apprehension. Without a word, he led his trembling relative to an apartment leading directly from the entrance hall.

Whilst Napier maintained a painful interview with Inez, he had heard an arrival, and a parley in the hall, which struck him as singular. However, his companion claimed his attention, although he could say little to allay her uneasiness, or excite her hopes. The suspicions which were now almost confirmed, in reference to William Neville's implication in the matter of such moment to them, were concealed, or unexplained; therefore, though Napier did his best to comfort her, considering the agitated state of his mind—pleading the necessity of proceeding to Vallis (for Napier had not yet visited his home), the interview was concluded, and Inez begged her companion to deliver many messages of affection to her friends as she accompanied him from the apartment.

On reaching the hall, they perceived the butler, O'Grady, standing with military precision, repeat-

ing, again and again, a positive order he had received, to a person whose back was turned to them. Seeing Napier advance, O'Grady assumed a still more resolute air, adding, to a repetition of his orders, "The raison belike is, that you can't see the misthress, and I'll stop here till ye're clear and clane out of the hall." And, as he so spake, he seemed by his glance to consider Napier as his authority. The individual with whom the old butler remonstrated turned a quick eye upon the new comers, and the cold, supercilious countenance of Wilton met their view. Napier bent a stern, questioning glance upon him, which was answered with—"Your tastes, like mine, are somewhat erratic; a few days since I think you were in Paris?"—and he bowed quite complacently. Napier answered not; his thoughts, with a noble forbearance, were given to Inez. That voice had called to remembrance a period of fear, persecution, and horror; and she trembled violently. She had barely strength, even with Napier's kind support, to totter back to the room she had just quitted.

"Do not leave us, Charles," she cried hysterically, as he placed her on a sofa,—"*his* presence is

ominous of evil. Oh ! what will become of us ?” And she hid her face from fear and dread.

“ This is no place for you now, dear sister,” he said, though an expression of acute pain crossed his countenance,—“ I will send Mary for you in the morning, for the future Vallis House shall shelter you, poor trembler.”

“ You say rightly,” remarked a low sad voice by his side, and now bending over the fainting form of her friend ; “ but for this night I will watch over her with a sister’s love !”

“ Ellen ! Ellen ! forgive me, I meant not——”

“ I have nothing to forgive—you meant nothing that could harm me, or offend me,” interrupted Ellen Neville in a voice of acute sorrow,—“ you have only spoken the truth ; it reveals the necessity of fulfilling the course you suggest. Leave us, I implore you,” she added pleadingly,—“ I have a little reason left—do not hurry my mind out of that little by the use of words which must be vain !”—and she knelt down by Inez, resolving she would not be shaken by witnessing the sorrow of him she loved so truly.

With wild and disordered feelings, Napier again

paced the hall in his egress from the house. Wilton had disappeared. With an almost bursting heart, Napier stood upon the flags, and turned a long wistful glance upon the dwelling he had quitted. His horse was brought to him; still his eye rested on the venerable pile. He was roused from his reverie by a hand being laid on his shoulder. He turned and saw an old faithful domestic of the house of Mowbray before him. "I have orders to accompany you to Vallis, Mr Napier," he said respectfully. "There are evil men abroad to-night."

"I came alone, Williams, and shall so return," was Napier's reply. "Believe me; my old friend, your pace would scarcely accord with mine!" Saying which, he sprang into the saddle and galloped recklessly down the avenue.

Napier was barely clear of the park of Mowbray, when, as the moon rose over the distant headland, he perceived a horseman in his path, whom he conjectured rightly to be Wilton. Napier drew rein, and prepared himself for whatever might come.

When Napier approached, Wilton said with imperturbable *sang froid*, "If this fitful moonlight

deceives me not, I have the honour to see Mr Napier?"

"Mr Wilton is correct in his supposition," answered Napier shortly, at the same time gathering his horse together, with the intention of pressing him again to the gallop, for he felt unwilling and unable to sustain an interview with the man near him.

Wilton, no doubt, divined his intention, for he said, "Shall we not bear each other company?" And he roused his horse with the spur. "Methinks it would be more pleasant than to thread these lanes alone; besides, from your glance just now, when we met at the house behind us, I was fain to construe it into a wish to stand thus with me, removed from interference."

Napier's bold heart could scarce brook this taunt: he had to exercise the severest fortitude, as he replied, "Impulse is a good companion, but a bad guide. If this pace suits you, well!—If not, choose your own!"—and he pulled his horse short up.

Wilton seemed inclined to push matters a little further. His tone was forced; and in his heart he purposed mischief. Curbing his rising passions,

he observed, "Before we part, at least allow me to give you a word of advice. Steer clear of Mowbray for the future; and when we meet in society, put a decent restraint upon your manner,—unless," he added carelessly, "the hand is prepared to back the insult the eye offers."

He had gained his point. He had touched Napier on a festering wound. The caustic, sneering tone increased the torture. He sprang with nervous energy in his stirrups, and seemed determined on following the wild impulse of passion, when, fortunately, his attention was attracted by the sound of a horse's feet, and, before he had time for action, an equestrian suddenly turned a corner and came upon them with almost headlong stride. At a word, the noble animal the stranger rode was motionless, and then a strange, uncouth, but athletic form sprang to the ground, and, advancing towards Napier, said huskily, "Well met, Mr Napier!—Well met!—You have given friends some uneasiness;—and not alone, I see?—Ha! friend!" he said, when satisfied with his scrutiny,—“Is it thou?—’Fore Heaven, thou art over-daring!”

“Out of my path, villain!” cried Wilton fiercely,

spurring his horse upon the stranger, and raising his heavy hunting-crop in readiness to strike.

The imperilled man, instead of retreating, made one stride forward, and, having relinquished his hold upon his own steed, he seized the curb-rein of his adversary's bridle, and, in spite of the bounds of the high-bred, infuriated animal, backed him to the very brink of a precipitous descent, and, holding him there with an iron grasp, he sternly said,—
“Thou wouldst scarcely meet thy deserts did I hurl thee to the rocks below; but 't were shame to sacrifice a noble horse with thee, or rob the hangman of his due!—Begone!”—With the word, he released the cowering animal, and stood firmly on the defensive.

“We shall meet again,” cried Wilton, in a voice of bitter rage, in vain striving to control the poor, scared animal he bestrode.

“We shall!” answered the other emphatically, —“and to thy cost!”—He then called to his horse, which came to him fearlessly, and with marked demonstrations of delight.

Napier had recovered his self-possession, though his surprise was great. The short fierce struggle

between the stranger and his foe admitted not of interference ; but now that it had passed, and Wilton was out of ear-shot, he said, " Mr Pearson !—I cannot be mistaken !—By what good fortune came you here so opportunely ? "

" At the earnest intercession of friendship," answered Mr Pearson, in a measured voice. " Mr Wilmott will explain his reasons for his concern and apprehension about you. You have tarried on the journey from London. You were expected yesterday ? " he said inquiringly, as he mounted his horse, and moved onward by Napier's side.

Napier was confounded. " Expected yesterday ? " he said,—" How could this be, since I had not intimated to a single individual in this country my intention to pay this flying visit. It is true that I was delayed on my road down ; but how can you have obtained such precise information in regard to my movements ? "

" Through the instigation of one whom you would not suspect, and whose motives are, I am aware, other than he would have them appear," was the answer. " In a word, the man whom I have just sent off in no agreeable humour constituted himself your *avant courier*."

"Inexplicable!" cried Napier, striving hard, but with little success, to reach the side of the singular individual who threaded his way with ease and perfect knowledge through by-roads, which considerably shortened the distance between Mowbray and Vallis. He paused not, nor gave himself any concern about Napier, until he came to the lodge; when, perceiving the inmates of the house there evidently waiting their arrival, he sprang from his horse, observing, in his old rough voice, "At last I have been successful—he comes." He had spoken to Lady Napier, who stood by Mr Wilmott's side.

"And you have run the great danger of defending him," said the grateful mother, with uneven accents. "God bless you for your generosity! How can I ever repay you, Mr Pearson?"

This speech strangely affected the wild, uncouth-looking man to whom it was addressed. With a voice scarcely articulate, he answered, "Oh! would to Heaven I could render you greater service!—that I could dispel the horrors which beset you, and ask your blessing then!"

During the few moments of wonder, inquiry, congratulation, and affectionate reproach, Mr Pearson withdrew, not wishing to be a restraint on so touch-

ing a demonstration of kindred love. Could *their* eyes have followed this saviour of Charles Napier's life down that dark avenue, they would have seen him rest his head upon the shoulder of the noble animal which stood by his side, and give vent to a passionate flood of tears.

CHAPTER XII.

NAPIER was once more in Paris. Langton met him with a cordial welcome. Wilton and Napier were again in the arena. The one still stern, watchful, and inquiring ; the other cool, wary, and audacious. Wilton's tactics had changed. He had seen it would not do openly to defy Napier ; and he, therefore, threw himself in his path without the least restraint, and would address him, or refer to him in society, in a way which made it appear they were on the most agreeable terms of acquaintance. And towards Langton, Wilton likewise assumed a bland, insinuating manner, which the former rather countenanced than discouraged.

Matters in reference to the great question of con-

cern to Napier were at a stand, or almost so. Though the discovery had been made that Armstrong lived, his whereabouts was an impenetrable secret. Notwithstanding M. Marcel's encouragement, Napier began to think he should never advance further in his object.

On his early return to Paris, Langton saw that his friend was subject to acute agitation of mind: he succeeded in drawing him into society, where he attracted admiration and interest. He found companions of superior talents, not exalted above the social art of rendering themselves agreeable; but, in the midst of pleasures, many a bitter thought reverted to those feeble and trembling beings he had left at Vallis and Mowbray. He could not think of his sad parting with Ellen Neville without shuddering. Nor could he contemplate the fulfilment of her foreshadowed fate without horror and dismay.

Napier's position was indeed a most distressing one; a man of less moral courage would have been prostrated in contemplating it. The principals in the drama, in which he took so prominent a part, were so closely entwined in the fate of those he

loved, that at times the idea of a successful termination of his labour was attended with an acute, intense sensation of dismay.

From the fact of the service rendered by Napier to Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny and her friend, combined with the Count Molé's friendship for him, Napier was always a welcome visitor at the Hotel D'Aigrigny. The head of the house was seldom seen there, for he had his own pleasures and pastimes to pursue. The younger man, Alphonse, did not reside at his brother's hotel,—he was only an occasional visitor: thus it was not uncommon for Napier or Langton to pass a portion of the morning in the society of the ladies of the mansion, seldom intruded on by any but the Count Molé, whom we may conclude was rather grateful than otherwise, that the presence of a fourth party enabled him to monopolize the society of Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny. Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny's friendship for Napier, blending with the Count Molé's regard, was a source of deep satisfaction to him. In Napier's intercourse, however, with Mademoiselle D'Albani, there was far from existing the same understanding. Actuated by a desire in the early

period of their acquaintance of proving to Napier her sense of gratitude for the service he had rendered her in conjunction with her friend, the fair Livia's manner towards him was sensitive and grateful; then, as she recollected the warning her relative had given her concerning him, her conduct was shrouded with an appearance of restraint. In her presence Napier was constrained; and when he could not fly out of himself through an unreserved confidence in his companion for the hour, he relapsed, not unfrequently, into those grave and silent moods which caused the fair Livia's thoughts to enter the arena of speculation. With a mind of pure and earnest feeling, young in experience, Livia D'Albani indulged in the dangerous sentiment of compassion. She contemplated—for she was but a child in society—her intercourse with him, and his return on the following day, with a pensive, secret satisfaction. Could her voice, to which none could listen but with intense emotion, soften the sorrow she perceived he was subject to? The idea was invested with a romantic charm; and as he stood entranced in evidence of the power of song, she would break off into one of those sweet melodies written

in his own tongue ; and when he turned to her, and she saw the light of enthusiasm, and he would feelingly express his gratitude, an emotion, it must be feared, far more dangerous, than compassion, was taking up an abiding place within the inner chamber of her young and susceptible heart.

Presuming on Napier's standing in his brother's household, Alphonse D'Aigrigny made considerable progress in his acquaintance with him. True, he was rather mortified at first that Napier was on quite such good terms with his family ; however, he guardedly suppressed his chagrin, and ministered to Napier's favour in the execution of divers commissions, &c. with apparent good-will.

Napier felt an interest in this individual,—a greater interest, indeed, than in any acquaintance he had made in Paris. The secret of it arose more from Alphonse D'Aigrigny's connexion with individuals Napier esteemed, than from admiration of the intellect with which Nature had endowed him ; for, with all the younger D'Aigrigny's unquestionable ability, the mind lacked a something,—a principle,—the bent was unsettled, or worse, the passion erratic and ill-regulated. One hour he was em-

ployed in translating from foreign literature those works which would strike the fancy, not the reason of the people he lived amongst ; another in addressing “ the people ” on the subject—that fruitful one in political Paris—of injured rights and liberties ; and again concerned in a monthly journal favourable to the existing government ; consequently, when Napier knew these facts, the ability of his companion met with less esteem than the gay Frenchman would have believed.

* * * * *

“ What subject engrosses your attention, my friend ? ” said Langton to Napier, as the former turned restlessly on his sofa, swathed in wrappers, and but the ghost of himself from the ravages of influenza.

Napier started as he was thus addressed, for he had been sitting for some time in that abstracted state which creeps over us when the mind is oppressed with impressions which it cannot clearly investigate. He did not therefore reply to the question, but, rising from his seat, he paced the room in silence for a time. At last he remarked :—

“ Our suspicions are well founded, I am sure.

ness, which he probes with revengeful malice.—I bide my time. I shall step over to the embassy for an hour," he added, as he left the room to avoid his friend's questioning.

As soon as Napier was clear of the hotel, Langton's manner changed. He had appeared listless, suffering, indifferent, unlike his former energetic self; now he flung wrapper after wrapper from him, and rose upon his legs, tottering at first, but nerve gained the day; and pacing the room he cried,—“I will lie here no longer like a worthless log whilst my friend suffers; is not his cause as near and dear to me as to himself? I will follow him to the embassy: I will stand by him in public; and let Wilton dare—ah! he knows his weakness,—yes, yes; and I know its burden. Napier, would I could soothe your anguish and hers! Richly does she deserve the love with which you cherish her; but, alas! what will come of it? An awful thought,” he said, and a shade of deep gloom overspread his countenance. “Heaven help him and her: if my suspicions are correct, I cannot fathom the extent of the misery in store for them. I would give my right hand to relieve him of only

half its burden." He moved slowly to his dressing-room, bent on fulfilling his expressed intention.

On calling at the embassy, Napier found Lord Mainville engaged with a minister of government, and concluded that a chance of an interview was small; he therefore withdrew, and bent his steps to M. D'Aigrigny's hotel. In the drawing-room he only found Livia D'Albani. He was much surprised to see that the lady's countenance contrasted strangely with its usual mild and tranquil composure. It now bore evidences of inward struggle: dejection of mind and fear were stamped upon it; her lips were parted as if she had striven to speak and could not,—it seemed as if she could barely repress her tears. Scarcely allowing himself to indulge in conjecture, Napier observed with much feeling:—

"You are distressed, Mademoiselle D'Albani, or unwell; command my services, I entreat you."

The sound of Napier's voice seemed to recall the fair girl's firmness. With an air of unaffected candour she looked up into his face, and said:—"Mr Napier, my conduct is strange, and you will consider it out of measure with the terms of our acquaint-

ance ; yet you will pardon me, I know, for I rely upon you as on a true friend, in being so inquisitive as to ask you whether you have true cause for dislike of—of—Mr Wilton ?”

Napier was astonished at the question,—his eye was fixed on the speaker ; there was no bashfulness, no flush upon the cheek, no symptom of mere curiosity ; her face wore one intense expression of earnestness and feeling. He remembered her manner the first evening he had seen her, when he had answered Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny's remark in reference to Wilton's union with Ellen Neville. What did these evidences of interest in Wilton mean ? Had she intrusted her happiness on so precarious a tenure as his treacherous favour ? It was a thought which gave Napier vast concern. Had her manner been different, he would have concluded that such must be the case : he hardly knew what to think ; therefore, putting a severe guard upon his language, he said :—

“From my knowledge of you, Mademoiselle D'Albani, I am able at once to acquit you of inquisitiveness ; for I am well aware you have some strong secret reason for your question ; but as far as

your supposition goes in the case in question, you must excuse me if I tell you that even acute and careful observers are often mistaken in their conclusions."

"Mr Napier," she answered in a troubled voice, "I have known you but for a short period, yet have learnt to place a reliance on your honour and integrity. It would be bold in me to tell you this if meant in the way of flattery or compliment; but do believe I have a more worthy motive. I would ask your confidence so far in charity."

Napier now believed that his companion had sufficiently betrayed her secret to admit of his venturing to say, which he did with emotion:—

"Mademoiselle D'Albani, my friendship for you emboldens me to say, that the experienced in life affirm that peace and happiness do not always wait on the realization of a present hope, even though the heart's sympathies are bound up in its fulfilment. Let me conjure you to regard this warning as a proof of confidence and esteem."

For a moment the listener's downcast eye was raised to Napier's with a look of deep and fixed

attention more than inquiry ; and then an expression of emotion, such as springs from bitterness of spirit, accompanied the quiver of the lip as she replied :—

“ I must be resigned then to a harsh conviction, more harsh indeed than I could have once thought the catalogue of human ills could enforce upon me.” So speaking she withdrew, leaving Napier as much astonished as uneasy. Could it be ? had that dark spirit ensnared the heart of one so brilliant, so pure, and beautiful,—and what had he done himself ? He had said words which wounded an already troubled mind,—he had consigned her to the fate of brooding, in the solitude of the heart, over that which was past remedy, with suspicion and mistrust. Other thoughts then occurred to him,—he would step between this poor girl and his arch-enemy. He found himself acutely affected at the idea of Livia D’Albani’s happiness being on the brink of overthrow. He would constitute himself her guardian, and with the true and conciliating reasoning of a friend, of a brother, seek to impress on her the necessity of overcoming so misplaced an affection. He was suddenly recalled to himself by

the approach of his friend Langton, and a few minutes afterwards Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny's arrival put an end to further conversation on the subject.

CHAPTER XIII.

REFLECTION on the subject in no way allayed the concern which Napier experienced in reference to the delusion he laboured under about Livia D'Albani. He thought, if his suspicions of an attachment existing between her and Wilton were correct, that sad and melancholy consequences must result therefrom. He could not fail to regard Livia with sincere interest: her conduct towards him had been both confiding and flattering. He had become alive to the amiable and pure tone of her mind; he had often been charmed out of himself by her wonderful voice; and though not fascinated, still he experienced the sole pleasure of his present existence in her society. As far as affection went,

Napier seemed to think he was in no danger ; he could not stifle his own cares. To forget was an indulgence withheld from him ; and the fact may be singular, but it is nevertheless true, that it was his love for Ellen that influenced him in a great measure in his desire to protect Livia D'Albani from the fate which seemed to him fraught with direful calamity. He could not well explain the true complexion of his feelings ; still in the many plans which he formed to save the fair Italian from misery, Ellen, in the spirit, was by him as his guide, and her vast influence over his secret nature inspired the most lively hope to be of service to one whom, but for Ellen, he might have loved.

Napier had explained his suspicions of Wilton's influence over the fair girl in question to Langton ; the latter had likewise formed his opinions, but to probe his friend, he remarked :—

“ If you are correct in your surmises, had you not better let the affair proceed : with her prudence and strength of character, there is no fear of Wilton's success, but through an honourable course—if he weds her.” Langton paused, as if he feared to continue the subject to which his words had opened a preface.

"I understand you," answered Napier, with generous warmth. "No, Langton, no! it would be a cruel act to recall comparative peace of mind, at the expense of another's happiness. Though I would, God knows my sincerity, sacrifice my life to ward off the fate that impends over her to whom my soul is irrevocably bound, I will not compass that desire by pursuing a course which would be most selfish, if not dishonourable. I have resolved on the line of conduct to pursue. I will probe her feelings once more; and if, as I suspect, her affections are given to that man, I will place the written history of poor Inez's persecution in her hands, that she may understand the character of her lover, and see how frail her hopes of happiness are."

"It would be a charitable act, no doubt," Langton answered, thoughtfully; "but I believe that when the mind has long been affected with an idea, particularly if it springs from acute sympathy of the passions, it is so engrossed with it, that the common faculty of reason is excluded from its counsel. Should Mademoiselle D'Albani's mind be thus biassed, your wishes would be futile. However, as events are uncertain, and passive good wishes of little service, you will act nobly in pursu-

ing the object you have in view." Turning over a letter he held in his hand, he added :—" Now we must attend to this matter. Neville has made quick wooing of it—how imprudent that girl has been !—they must be undeceived. Our first course will be to see Lord Mainville, and then you can get over your interview with M. Marcel."

Napier assented to his friend's views, and their steps were bent to the embassy, where they found Lord Mainville ready to receive them.

After having conducted his visitors to his sanctum, his lordship said :—" Your note, Mr Langton, has caused me no slight uneasiness. Public affairs, if not at all times easy of adjustment, do not affect any individual peace ; but ' peculiar private disclosures ' are unwelcome guests, creating a confusion not to be silenced by diplomatic tact."

" I am anxious, however," answered Mr Langton, " to ensure your lordship's interest and co-operation, to ward off calamity from innocence and worth. When I have submitted my reasons for appealing to your judgment, I do not think you will shrink from the task I seek to impose upon you." And here Langton drew from Lord Main-

ville a cognizance of the increasing intimacy between William Neville and Miss Stanley, to which he asserted the lady's family gave its countenance, and having elicited this, he gravely remarked :—

“Facts are in my possession, which place an insuperable bar to the connexion.”

“Indeed!” observed Lord Mainville, with a concerned air: “My friend Stanley has set his heart upon the matter; it was only yesterday he told me how much he was pleased at the understanding which existed between the young people. Will you have the goodness to explain?”

“I must first observe,” Langton said, “that I received a letter from Miss Neville a few days since, written under feelings of acute uneasiness, informing me, that she had deputed a clergyman of my acquaintance in England, of the name of Wil-mott, a man of pure and exalted character, to state to me the views that her brother's friends were compelled to entertain, in reference to this rumoured engagement between the parties in question.”

“But,” cried Lord Mainville, “to allay my curiosity, and to remove the impression of extreme

singularity of conduct on the part of Miss Neville, pray tell me why Colonel Neville does not interfere in the matter himself. It is strange for a young person, like Miss Neville, to take such a responsibility on her own shoulders, to me the more inexplicable, from a knowledge of her father's character."

Langton replied, in a low, sad voice :—

"Paralysis, Lord Mainville, has reduced the man, you once knew possessor of a strong and vigorous mind, to the condition of a child, or worse. Miss Neville is consequently compelled to assume a position altogether at variance, you may believe, with her tastes or inclinations."

"But Miss Neville is contracted, so report says, to Mr Wilton—Mr Wilton is William Neville's bosom friend.—I am at a loss to make all this out—" and Lord Mainville looked bewildered.

Napier had retired to a bay-window at the further end of the apartment. Langton directed a quick, concerned glance towards him, as he replied :—

"Miss Neville possesses a fine heart, and a magnanimity of mind that cannot fail to command the deference and respect of all who are honoured by her acquaintance. Still I am not in a position

to discuss the merits of the report to which your lordship has referred. To return to the point in question. Suppose I tell you, that from the wilfulness of William Neville's conduct, during the past five years, he has hedged himself round with difficulties, which would involve a person in misery to whom he became contracted,—would such facts guarantee your interference?"

"Proof of past error does not guarantee future shame," was the answer; "and it is said, although I do not subscribe to the doctrine, that a reformed rake makes the best husband. Should Miss Stanley, at the sign of our interference, resolve to become a martyr to this eccentric ambition—girls of her stamp are almost sure to go to the deuce, if you evince a desire to keep them from his clutches; and as far as the young lady in question is concerned, if I went with the intelligence you give me, she would hum a line of Metastasio to check a retort, which, but for good manners, she would indulge in at the expense of my prosaic mood; and as for the old general, he would say, 'It was better a son-in-law had sown his wild oats, than to have to sow them.'"

"You compel me then, my lord," observed

Langton, "to go a step further. In placing this letter of Mr Wilmott's in your hands, you will be satisfied my conduct is consistent."

Lord Mainville perused the letter Langton had given him carefully at first, but suddenly he became greatly astonished, and he cried,—“Extraordinary! Good heavens, how could this have been managed?” He read further,—“Ah! I see,” he said, “that rash young man is unconscious that his vile scheme was made subservient to his own confusion. But the poor girl, I pity *her*; *she* has found little happiness in the connexion.”

“You can perceive,” Langton answered, in reply to these disjointed questions and remarks, “that I am only the vehicle of Mr Wilmott's opinions. From what has been disclosed, I conclude you will reverse your decision of non-interference.”

“Undoubtedly, or my conduct would be criminal.” After a short pause, his lordship remarked,—“It seems inhuman to protract a disclosure of matters as they stand. Besides, you must place Lady Napier in a strange light before the world, in appearing to countenance a person of blemished character.”

"I am aware of good reasons for the present silence," was the reply; "it is not time, unfortunately, to grapple with the difficulty—more I cannot say."

"Enough! enough!" answered his lordship. "I can fancy there is more in this affair than meets the eye. I will at once do all you desire,—Julia Stanley must of course be saved. Miss Neville's is a strange position—I must confess I am bewildered."

Langton was silent: satisfied that he had successfully accomplished his mission, he thought it prudent to withdraw. Napier's interview with M. Marcel was long, and not unimportant. The minister plainly expressed his hopes of obtaining valuable information on the matter of such personal interest to Napier. In a few weeks he believed he should place him in a position to advance surely and steadily to the fulfilment of his object.

On leaving the bureau of M. Marcel, Napier's steps were bent to the hotel of Monsieur D'Aigrigny. He had resolved on seeing Livia D'Albani, and on fulfilling, had he a chance of doing so, the task which he had marked out for himself in rela-

tion to her. If there were greater difficulties in the accomplishment of his object than he at present surmised, he would interest Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny in the affair, as he was conscious that a warm and earnest regard existed in her mind towards her friend and guest. On Napier's arrival at the Hotel D'Aigrigny, he was admitted to the presence of those he sought. The Count Molé and Alphonse D'Aigrigny were likewise there. Napier was at once struck with surprise at the restraint and uneasiness which evidently oppressed the party on which he had obtruded. Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny was pale and grave,—she sat listening to, certainly, but not evincing pleasure at, the affectionate courtesy of her noble lover, whilst her fair guest's attitude betokened debility, nervousness, and languor; a something about her demeanour which intimated that etiquette alone constrained her to endure the whispered compliments which M. Alphonse indulged in. It seemed to Napier that he was not met with that candour and frankness which had been extended towards him in his former visits. Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny fixed a steady, earnest, troubled eye upon him, as Count Molé warmly

pressed his hand ; but there was not the usual smile to greet him, or the word of pleasure. And as he moved towards the fair Livia, her countenance was downcast, and she scarcely muttered a tremulous reply to his courteous salutation. Alphonse D'Aigrigny's brow slightly flushed as Napier stood by him, and he then moved away with a light remark in regard to some appointment in hand, upon which he left the apartment. As Napier was now alone with Livia D'Albani, her agitation of mind became even more apparent : he interpreted her conduct to result from the nature of their last conversation ; and he wished to make himself better understood. But he was in difficulty ; and although doing a good deed should be the easiest and pleasantest thing in life, Napier felt quite humiliated,—he was a pauper in words, though his heart was rich in generous sentiment. When Livia observed Napier's concern and confusion, a languid smile flitted over her face, as she said :—

“ We are dull company, Mr Napier : if your face retains that expression of severe thought, I shall boldly exercise a friend's privilege, and inquire into the reason of your concern,—would you confess freely ? ”

"I would," answered Napier, in a low earnest voice: "I would not hesitate to tell you the cause of my concern; and perhaps my candour would place a dear friend in a position to shield herself from an evil which closely environs her."

The lady did not seem so much surprised at this speech as Napier expected, and she replied with undisguised earnestness:—

"I think I understand you; if I am not in error, speak freely. I have few friends,—you would perform a friend's duty,—your voice and manner warrant the supposition."

"But I shall have to touch on a delicate subject," remarked Napier, questioningly; "perhaps I may involve myself in difficulties, and the most severe would be to incur your displeasure."

"Speak! speak! you cannot offend me; pray speak openly. Do not hesitate!" and she seemed exercising her utmost self-command; her lips were compressed and her head slightly raised, as she fixed an inquiring gaze upon her companion.

"I have said I shall have to touch upon a delicate subject," remarked Napier, gravely, as he noticed her intent scrutiny of his countenance;

“and as the necessary property of friendship is disinterestedness, believe, in the exercise of the liberty you afford me, that I am quite free from a selfish or a false motive. The last time I had the pleasure of your society, you questioned me in reference to my dislike of Mr Wilton. Now, although, as a general principle, I consider, if we cannot speak well of another, it is best to be silent, still, there are positions in which we may be placed, from knowledge of a character, wherein silence is out of measure with good feeling and honour; for instance, if facts are in our possession which prove an individual, who holds authority over the peace and happiness of a friend, to be, from habitual guilt and lawlessness, beyond the pale of honour and regard, I consider we obey the law of right and humanity in opening the eyes of the person whose best interests in life are so near an overthrow. Now, you convinced me the other day, from a remark which followed your question to me, that you are interested in Mr Wilton; would you tell me, then, if you have an objection to my placing in your hands a partial evidence of the reason of his being my declared enemy?”

It is impossible to express the effect this speech had on Mademoiselle D'Albani ; she sat motionless for a few minutes, then clasped her hands together, and looked up with an expression of such sorrow and trouble into Napier's face, that his fortitude was rudely shaken. At last she said, in a low quivering voice :—

“ You are right ; I am interested in his welfare,—I have been made to play a cruel part,—I am punished for my disingenuous conduct. His welfare is united to mine by a chain no circumstance can sever. I am well aware of the purity of your intentions ; but, alas ! remarks which tend to shake my faith in him have the effect of a harrow upon every fibre of my heart. Yet my eyes are already partly open ; I will not fly the ordeal—intrust me with the evidence of his dishonour.” And as she spoke these last words, tears which she had striven to suppress, forced their way. Napier regarded these silent tokens of sorrow with bitter feelings : he felt his position to be acutely distressing ; whichever way he turned, he found that in exposing the villainy of others, he was heaping misery on the hearts of those he most valued. He did not attempt to

console his afflicted companion. After a short space, he drew a small parcel forth, and placed it in her hands. She received it, saying,—

“Your confidence is great; I will not betray it!” And either not able to endure in society the weight of her distress, or fearing to make her friend, Pauline D’Aigrigny, a witness of her uneasiness, as she saw her, with Count Molé, drawing near, she left her seat, and quitted the apartment.

Napier, too, was ill at ease in his present company; he knew not wherefore, but he felt convinced that something had occurred to fetter Mademoiselle D’Aigrigny’s feelings of regard for him: her eye avoided his; her manner was confused and constrained, altogether unlike its former friendly and courteous complaisance; therefore, after a few casual remarks, he departed from the hotel.

Scarcely had Napier retired, when Count Molé exclaimed:—

“Pauline, what ails you? You are altogether unlike yourself?”

“Victor,” she replied, “I am almost distracted! I could not tell you why, whilst M. Napier was present, for fear he might hear my remarks. Listen

to me;" and with a voice scarcely articulate, she made some disclosure which left her countenance as 'pale as drifted snow. Nor was Count Molé exempt from consternation.

"Dear one," were his first words, "it is impossible. There must be some mistake or confusion of purpose. The idea is insupportable."

"It is true! it is true!" she answered with bitter emotion. "You can conceive my feelings in having to reveal this to you. Oh! my poor, rash, head-strong brother! But you will aid *us*, Victor; without you we cannot proceed."

"I will, my poor Pauline, to the utmost of my ability, my heart and soul, upon my honour," was the reply, uttered with much emphasis.

"I knew I could rely upon your zeal," remarked the lady, looking up now with a return of confidence; "your generous heart is never appealed to in vain; but we must lose no time,—Livia assures me, that on the third night from this the attempt is to be made. We have resolved to be present."

"You! you!" cried Count Molé; "you enter that den of infamy! Never! never shall your ears be polluted by the language you would hear there!"

"I fear it must be; Livia is resolved upon it, I assure you, with a will few could shake. You can be near; take Mr Langton to your counsel, no one else! His disguise and form would not be recognised; besides, he is a consummate actor, as we have seen for our amusement. You would be known," she said, with the proud spark of affection for a moment lighting her countenance; "few but would detect beneath mask or domino the proud step and martial figure of Count Molé."

"We will think more of this," he said, gravely. "Pauline," he observed, "I would not presume on your confidence in me; if there be a secret, hold it sacred; if not, am I wrong in believing that your fair friend, and guest, has become too sensible of our friend Napier's fine character for her peace and happiness?"

"I can surmise that it may be so," answered Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny; her emotion and grief at this discovery were beyond all things acute and distressing. "I trust, however, that the suspicion is wrong. If not, the light of a pure heart will be extinguished. She would never love but once,—
if her love were unrequited, existence would

be a void; and M. Napier's affections, I know, are faithfully centred in another."

"Ah!" echoed Count Molé, "is it so? This throws a glimmer of light upon the affair. You allude to Miss Neville? I have heard of this." He paused for a time, as if uncertain of his thoughts. At last, he cried with stern emphasis, "Napier I can and will protect; thus, I may partly repay my debt of gratitude to his brother. By Heaven! that scoundrel Wilton is a bold schemer. I should not be surprised——But conjecture is vain," he added, noticing the pallor of his companion's countenance, "Be composed, Pauline; I hope things are not so bad as they appear. I promise you to endeavour to protect *your* brother's name from infamy."

CHAPTER XIV.

WILLIAM NEVILLE was alone in his apartment, brooding with the impotence of evil passion on the turn circumstances had taken in reference to his position in General Stanley's family. It would be distasteful to enumerate the follies he was disposed to commit when it was intimated to him, in pretty plain terms, "That further communication between him and the Stanley family was strictly prohibited." He knew it not, but he had still been duped by Wilton. Wilton it was who caused publicity to be given to the affair, and he had managed to furnish Mr Wilmott with the intelligence on which he had acted. It was not Wilton's purpose to allow of a union between his *friend* Neville and Miss Stanley : had his first stratagem been unsuccessful, he would have accomplished his object in another way ; but he built hopes on this scheme, as it was easy, by exciting

Mr Wilmott to interference, to make the infuriated Neville think that Napier had been at the bottom of the matter ; and then, as he knew Neville would judge of the action which he believed to have been committed by the event to himself, he doubted not that his exasperation would lead him to subscribe to designs which he was maturing, but which he feared to submit to him whilst his passions remained in their then lethargic state towards Napier. *Now* all this was arranged to his satisfaction ; it was easy for Wilton to don the mask of sympathy, and, by his crafty tact, excite almost to fury the worst passions of his poor tool.

In his rage, Neville thought not of the true character of Wilton's purposes : he caught at the insinuation dropped, that Napier (this Wilton had been told in confidence) had been the cause of the mischief, and Mr Langton had been the spokesman. It was enough. Neville had sent to demand "satisfaction" from those to whom he had imputed the evil done him ; and now he was waiting the return of the friend he had deputed to perform this delicate mission. He was thus left alone to ponder over what had overtaken him. He

was compelled to refrain from his usual way of banishing reflection, because he expected there would be a speedy call upon his nerve and coolness. The bottle was therefore thrust aside,—he was alone. One minute he clenched his fists, and in bitter ebullition of feeling vented curses on those who had frustrated his desires ; and the next his countenance would betray the fact that his mind was not free of the suspicion and curse of wrong-doing in the cry : “ Too late ! too late ! there is now no escape.” A letter before him had probably contributed to draw forth this startling confession. It was from Ellen. He had that morning received it. She had written to him, conjuring him to return to England to reveal to her the extent of Wilton’s authority ; and the pure spirit of her devotion to her father had drawn so touching a picture of his state, that, as his eye followed the thrilling sentiment, his head sank in shame, and shame was blended with despair, as he still cried : “ Too late ! too late ! there is now no escape.”

As Neville gazed on Ellen’s words to him, he would then lavish his bitter accusations on Wilton. Even in this hour of passion and waywardness, Ne-

ville's feelings were influenced by Ellen's letter, and, after he had gazed for a time moodily upon it, he cried :—" This duty done I will return. I will come to a proper understanding with Wilton, or rid myself of his authority, even at the hazard of my own life."

At this moment the door of the apartment opened, and Wilton, with the elder D'Aigrigny, entered.

" Ha !" cried Neville starting up. " Come at last, Monsieur D'Aigrigny ; did General Stanley explain ?"

" No," replied the individual addressed ; " he treated the message I had the honour to bear him with cool disdain,—refused to enter into particulars, saying, that he had expressed his decision in his note to you, which was final."

" And did you take my message to those meddling fools, as agreed upon ?" said Neville with compressed lip and frowning brow, his untutored passions again assuming their ascendancy. " Did you fix time and place ? 'tis their work,—curse them : when shall I meet them,—ay, both of them ? Speak, man, speak !"

" Be calm, Monsieur," replied D'Aigrigny coolly ;

“I will then inform you how I acted in your behalf. After my interview with General Stanley, I called on the gentlemen in question, and briefly explained the nature of my instructions. They heard me out with calm indifference, and then Mr Langton said : ‘I shall not resort to subterfuge : tell Mr Neville this affair is mine ; that I decline a hostile meeting, promising to explain my reason if he will honour me by a visit.’ More passed between us ; for in a retort to a remark I made, Mr Langton handled me roughly ; and I am indebted to Mr Napier’s generosity for not embroiling myself in a business which seems to attach small credit, Mr Neville, to the parties concerned. Having fulfilled my mission, I resign the powers invested in me into your hands.”

The speaker paused for a few seconds, and then, comprising both Neville and Wilton in his glance, he said :—

“Messieurs, a word with you. I have now to say, that from the treatment I have received this morning at the hands of men of high integrity and honour, and who have heretofore observed towards me the strict rule of courtesy and good feeling, I am

conscious you have put an affair upon me which has done me no credit to appear in. I am answerable for my words : and I further tell you that I shall sift this business thoroughly ; and if, as I suspect, my honour has been trifled with, you will hear further from me," and with stern hauteur he turned from his *friends*, and left the apartment.

"You will labour in vain, *mon ami*," said Mr Wilton, in allusion to M. D'Aigrigny's threat ; "or if you chance upon matter sufficient to found a message upon, I will answer it in the *Bois de Boulogne*. My hand is out—I want a little practice. And let me see—Friday morning?—ay, ay; the thing may be serviceable. I think I will convey the hint for him to work upon. 'T won't do to let such fellows bully one. Now, Neville, what course do you pursue?"

"I will go to them myself," he answered, hoarse with rage. "I will confront them, and see if my taunts will not goad their coward hearts to action. Ay! and I have an old score to settle with that meddling fool, Langton. Has he not duped me throughout?"

"He has! But stay, Neville!—Stay!—This is

stark madness. You will come off second best if *you* meddle with them so openly. Nay, you will undo all! Join in my scheme; then you will have vengeance without danger to yourself. They will not fight! That you have seen. We are beneath their pride! Ha! ha!" Thus he added fuel to the fire of Neville's wrath. Then he added, "True, a slight tap of your cane may do Napier good, if he has any quick blood in him. But I suppose you would hardly like to push matters so far?"

Neville took all this literally. He was in too great a passion to cast a thought on his companion's artifice.

"I will go," he cried. Wilton was about to expostulate, when the other turned away, saying, "You have said enough! Hold yourself in readiness!—I will be back soon!"

"All right!" was the reply,—"T were pity to baulk your humour. And, Neville, if you do give a lesson to a self-sufficient fool, strike home!—Wounded honour has no tongue, remember!"

A few minutes' walk took Neville to Napier's hotel. He stalked into the presence of the men he sought with an unceremonious and angry mien.

Napier and Langton were together, and as they perceived their visiter they rose from their seats.

"I am not come here," cried Neville, with a frowning brow, "to bandy compliments with you, but to demand your reasons for not accepting a message which gentlemen hold it unsafe to refuse."

Langton coolly faced the intemperate man, saying, "Mr Neville, revolve in your mind the events which are the source of this mortification to your pride, and you will then perceive that I am debarred from giving you what you are inclined to call satisfaction. I need not put this to you in plainer words; and I say this in person, instead of setting this little world around us on your back by notifying as much to the individual who waited on me an hour since!"

"Do you still decline a meeting, now that I demand it of you in person?" asked Neville, with a face quite purple from suppressed passion.

"I do," Langton answered gravely. "Independently, Mr Neville, of the gross folly of exposing myself to be shot at, for taking upon myself a very necessary duty, I am aware we should not meet on equal grounds. I have no motive for seeking to

cast a cloak, through an act of violence, over the work that I have done. I have been the instrument, I confess, of performing a positively imperative task, proving myself, in doing it, as much your own friend as the protector of those whom you would have deeply injured. Therefore, why should I negative the service I have done you by meeting you in combat as an enemy?"

"Because I desire it; and will have it so!" cried Neville. "Suppose I read your interference in my affairs a gross presumption, what stands in the way of your inclinations bending to my own?"

"A sense of duty which I owe to myself as a gentleman and a man of honour," Langton observed in a cold stern voice.

"Ha! who are you, to affect this lordly tone? A nobody—a mere adventurer, as far as I can judge, whose pretensions to the title of gentleman are dated from the period you commenced your occupation of toadeater to the man by you. Ah! you frown!—Do you understand my meaning?—or, is that quivering lip a sign of arrant cowardice?"

Langton's lip did quiver, and a fire was in his eye which no living being had ever seen before.

A moment and his hand clenched as if he had resolved to strike Neville to the earth. But before he moved, better feelings returned to quell his fury ; and then, fixing a glance of withering scorn upon him who had so ruthlessly assailed him, he said :—
“ You have spoken in the very drunkenness of rage. Before long human justice will advance its claim upon you. Stand forward then, and only partially prove your innocence of a great and deadly crime, and I will hold plainer speech with you ; but until then your taunt or mockery shall meet no other answer than this :—‘ That, as you are situated, mine is not the hand that can redeem your honour ! ’ ”

Furious at such a stern rebuke, Neville turned upon Napier, saying,—“ Do you mean to shield yourself under the same cowardly evasion ? ”

“ Certainly ; did I act otherwise, I should establish a dangerous precedent,” answered Napier with warmth.

“ Then nothing remains, but for me to have recourse to a rule long since established,” remarked Neville in a cool resolute voice, strangely contrasting with his former furious tone. And he drew

near to Napier, evidently with the determination of striking him.

The veins in Langton's forehead seemed about to burst. His face was crimson. Still he did not interfere.

Napier, at Neville's approach, had drawn himself to his full height; his frame seemed to double its former size, his head was thrown back, and he appeared more than able to contend against a man of double his physical strength, so resolute and daring was his mien.

And why did Neville pause as he came towards him? Was he daunted by the courageous attitude Napier had assumed? Had he suddenly turned craven? No! His eye had chanced to rest upon the table, as he drew near, at which Napier was standing, and was fixed upon the open case of a miniature-likeness. 'T was a terrible attraction. The rash man's vision was fascinated—his fury blasted in its height—his lip moved spasmodically—his right hand sank, for the nerve which armed it was driven from him.

Napier noticed all; and drawing the now cowering man to him, he reached forward to the table,

and took up the miniature, saying, in a voice of deep emotion, as he held it before Neville's eyes :—

“What! is the sight of this countenance so baleful to your conscience, that it paralyzes you thus? Ay, gaze upon these lineaments; do you not recognise the face of him who was once your friend, who once hazarded his own life to save yours? Speak, Neville. Why are you thus tongue-tied?—Why has your sight become thus dim?—Why does your hand tremble in my grasp?—Why has the whole current of your blood become thus stagnated?—Why, but that you feel the torture of the self-convicted!” Napier, after having thus spoken, released his hold on Neville, and clasped his hands before his eyes, crying in tones of bitter anguish : “Now almost the worst is known.”

For a short period there was a profound stillness in the room. An apparently trivial circumstance had brought about a mighty convulsion of feeling in the breast of each individual present. Neville's fury had been dispersed as chaff before the wind; even now he stood as if under the authority of some fearful spell; whilst those two men by him, whose nerves had been braced to submit to insult, and to

comport themselves with pride and dignity, were suddenly subject to a shock which throbbed as a mighty pulse to the centre of their being.

Neville was the first to break this painfully expressive silence. He laughed hoarsely as he said :—

“So you think to cozen me with this piece of acting,—a well-contrived scheme ! But what have I to do with your brother ? Ha, ha ! your amiable enthusiasm is really quite enchanting.”

Napier replied not to the taunt—grief had taken the place of manly indignation. He rang the bell, and as his servant entered, he remarked to Neville, in a low grave voice,—

“Feign as you will, William Neville ; *fears*, resulting from the same cause, but of widely different character, are active within the minds of both of us—God grant *mine* are not mated to misery for you and yours.”

With a dogged air, Neville moved away. He looked utterly degraded—his mind in a stupor of abject confusion. On his return to his rooms, he flung himself into a chair and bent his head,—an evidence of the state of one whose intellect and physical energy had been crushed by an overwhelm-

ing blow. Dread was less a shadow than a reality, and a truth came from it which spoke chillingly unto him.

CHAPTER XV.

So far Wilton's schemes to embroil Napier in a quarrel had failed ; and Wilton, it will be conceived, now grew more desperate. He had planned well for his purpose, but his antagonist as yet had assumed so stern and resolute a posture, that out of his designs grew entanglement and difficulty. But he was not a man to falter in his purpose : himself or Napier should triumph ; on this he had fixed his mind, and he would not believe that he should be foiled. He had cause to dread the inquiry which M. Marcel, on Napier's behalf, was secretly pursuing ; and he resolved, with his reckless audacity, to silence it if possible. He had sought for, but had obtained no insight into Livia D'Albani's

feelings in regard to Napier : his last private communication to her had remained unanswered ; therefore the idea of approaching Napier on this point was abandoned, and he decided Livia should be recalled to England. He no longer sought to blind society by the appearance of intimacy between him and his enemy, but with a resolute daring, backed by wit and tact of the most bitter sort, he hesitated not at striking at Napier's character and reputation.

To succeed in this his malicious purpose was not a difficult task. Napier had been reserved ; nay, "unsocial," as the gay world termed it. He had confined himself a good deal to the society of a few agreeable acquaintances ; and as this fact argued—so Wilton's friends thought—an idea of superiority over them, they only required a spur to give direction to their enmity. Thus the sneer, the broad whisper, the stare of impudence, practised at first out of novelty and fancy, became, on the privilege which custom affords, the result of an imaginary grievance, and those who exercised their talent this way, learned to regard Napier as an individual from whom they had received offence.

Wilton knew society well. He knew that he

who was esteemed a fortunate man would be a popular one. He saw Napier was regarded in this light at first, and he soon insinuated reports of the lien he held over the whole of the Vallis property ; and thus he invested himself with social importance at the expense of Napier's. Others, too, followed him : singularly enough, even those who had cause to mistrust him succumbed to his deceitful influence. Such is the authority of tact and intellect in society.

Napier was thus sadly harassed and irritated ; but for Langton he would have committed himself ; for the prudence of even an experienced mind is not unfrequently overridden by the quick impulse of warm feelings.

There was a point, however, still within the reach of Wilton's malice, over which even Langton's solicitude and friendship could not cast a protecting shield. Friends at Vallis had become uneasy—suspicious ; and this feeling caused a reserve in their correspondence. An anxious warning tone was adopted, which conveyed to Napier's susceptible mind the belief that opinion in regard to him had in some way been shaken. The truth was, that

Wilton had hinted in his communication with an officer of his old regiment, still quartered at S——, that Napier was training on well; that he had two or three affairs of gallantry in hand; was reported to have won large sums of money at a noted gambling-house; and, that the “on-dit” of the day was, that he was the successful aspirant to the favour of an Italian girl, whose attractions had set the inflammable heart of Paris in a flame.

First, through Mrs Dyson, these garbled reports travelled to Mrs Brown, the Nevilles’ housekeeper. Napier was a great favourite with her, and of course she could not rest until she had ascertained her young mistress’s opinion about them. Poor Ellen! what had she to do with the world’s talk now? Her interest in matters beyond her father’s chambers, she had schooled her reason to believe, was quite extinct; but such resolve was ineffectual: reason has little authority over the all-powerful passions of the heart. The woman that loves truly has ever a heart-ennobling solicitude for the weal of him she loves, even though she is aware that the accidents of life debar her from finding repose for her affection. At first it was

only natural that these venomous attacks should cause some astonishment and dismay at Vallis House ; indeed, on reflection, the uneasiness of feeling was scarcely allayed,—for they were nervous and timorous in their affliction, and in their present state of mind disposed to attach more credit to things which could alarm than to place reliance in the fact that difficulties feebly encountered invite new ones.

Speaking literally, there was small credence given to the truth of these reports : still the Napiers took alarm. They began to *think*; and *thought* once directed towards a chance of error in one in whom we take an affectionate interest, produces a confusion in the sympathies, which has a contagious influence. Napier's eyes had now become quite unsealed to things which were enough to harrow every fibre of his mind. He saw that success in the great labour in hand would leave him bereft of every near and darling hope that he had ever cherished in reference to self. Neville's manner in his last interview quite confirmed the justice of his dark suspicions ; this haunted him. Langton often surprised him in a stern, bitter reverie. Thus things stood with Napier a short

time subsequent to William Neville's forced interview with him. Irritated by the conduct of Wilton's tools, as well as from depression of mind, he had all but withdrawn from society. He had neither seen nor heard of Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny and her guest; the only person who obtruded on his presence was his former companion Alphonse, who was constantly by him, striving with engaging and courteous attention to cheer his spirits, and withdraw him from his seclusion. The interest this individual evinced,—an interest so solicitous and refined,—could not fail to win on the feelings of a man of Napier's generous and impulsive nature. He had penetrated into Napier's feeling of disgust for Wilton, and sympathized with a friend's privilege; nay, his penetration had been so acute, that Napier had some time ceased to wonder at his intimate acquaintance with his affairs; though it must be confessed that Monsieur Alphonse so dexterously handled his knowledge on this head, that it seemed that his remarks arose only from an insight into matters gleaned from Napier's own admissions. Happening one morning to enter into Napier's room unannounced, M. Alphonse over-

heard his friend remark to Langton, "that from a note he had received from M. Marcel, he expected they should be shortly called on to leave Paris."

Langton soon after left the apartment, when Alphonse D'Aigrigny said, in a tone of injured feeling :—

"My dear friend, you have not been candid with me! Why have you not told me that we were soon to lose you?"

"Because my movements are uncertain," answered Napier, uneasy at being questioned on a point on which he desired to observe a profound secrecy.

"Ah!" was the rejoinder: "I wish you success." After some hesitation, he remarked: "I know, Napier, that your visit to this gay capital is fraught with one great and serious purpose. Our intimacy has given me an insight into matters, and I have gleaned from other sources a something which has placed me in a position to be useful to you. You are in search after a man who once made himself very obnoxious to me. What say you if I can point him out to you?"

Napier was a good deal surprised; it was some

time before he said, "I shall not ask you, D'Aigrigny, through what source you have obtained a knowledge of affairs which concern me closely enough; you have a motive in your remarks; tell me, therefore, what that motive is."

"To serve you, my dear friend, to the extent of my power," was the short but not ungracious answer.

"Then perform the service you have hinted at, and you will earn my deepest gratitude."

"Very well; but you will have to attend the masquerade ball given at the salon de V—— to-night."

"You mean that I must visit the most notorious gambling-house in Paris! Alphonse, the individual with whom I would seek a brief interview is far from here, I am given to believe on good authority."

"He may have returned. I assure you, *mon ami*, that a gambler possesses a roving inclination, and as many disguises as a harlequin, if necessary to his schemes."

"I believe in your wish to serve me," said Napier after a short reflection; "you have always

been my friend. I will attend this masquerade affair to-night, and rely implicitly on your zeal."

"I am proud of your trust," was the reply. "Leave the arrangements to me, and dine at my rooms at seven." Turning as he was about quitting the apartment, he added:—

"Do not mention your purpose to Langton. I am aware of the interest he takes in your concerns, and I should like to greet him with a surprise on our return." Napier assented to his friend's wishes, and then Alphonse D'Aigrigny took his departure.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE evening came, and we will follow Napier and Alphonse d'Aigrigny on their mission. The Salon de V——, a noted gambling-house, was this night open to the gay world in its alluring form, in its decorated character.

The evening was growing somewhat late : many a Greek and Turk, Italian bandit and Egyptian queen, had lounged their time upon the springy sofas, or less comfortable settees. Those who did not care just then to try their fortunes at *rouge et noir*, or at those games so ingeniously devised and presided over by some sleight of hand "croupier," were engaged in somewhat overstrained dalliance with fair nymphs, who rested by them.

Some half-hour prior to this period, Napier and Alphonse D'Aigrigny entered the dancing salon. They were both attired in domino and mask. The two friends took several turns round the salon, interested, it would seem, in the novelty presented to their view. Napier then paused, observing to his companion :—

“ I will not detain you. I will take a survey of the tables by and by. I quite agree with you on the necessity of proceeding cautiously. I see it is not the fashion for men to pair off here ; therefore, if we remain together, our conduct will excite curiosity, perhaps.”

“ You are right,” was the answer. “ I will leave you for a little while, but my eyes shall be at work for you. I know *his* tastes, and soon expect to make a discovery ;” and D'Aigrigny passed on into another apartment.

Napier took a vacant seat, and seemed to watch the motions of the figures that were labouring through the polka. Though Napier's eye was fixed upon the moving figures around him, in reality he took small note of what was going on. One all-engrossing thought occupied his mind.—What if he

could this night stand face to face with Armstrong ! How vast the stride he might make towards piercing to the depths of that horror which was eating his very heart away. His stern reverie was interrupted by,—

“ If I do not obtrude, sir, may I pass to the seat on your right hand ? I fear by standing here I may obstruct the movements of these divers pairs, who, it strikes me, exercise their limbs somewhat widely of what one concludes to be the legitimate bounds of even this eccentric dance.”

Napier’s eye rose ; he saw he was addressed by a person robed as an Abbé. He was struck by the half-sarcastic, yet finely modulated tone of voice, and, drawing himself somewhat aside to allow this individual to pass, he said :—

“ I suppose the pleasure lies in the extravagance of the step.”

The Abbé took the seat next to Napier, and shortly after observed, as if in reply to Napier,—

“ Well, I suppose it may be pleasure ; but I, who know nothing of these vanities, cannot help fancying that those twirling couples are nigh frightened out of their wits, or they would never so cruelly tax

Some half-hour prior to this, Alphonse D'Aigrigny entered. They were both attired in dress two friends took several interested, it would seem, their view. Napier's companion:—

"I will not detain the tables by any means, the necessity of waiting for crows' not the fashion of thanks: why may I if we remain? 'unlucky certainties' osity, perhaps middle age?"

"Your face of features, I judge by the voice you favour," answered the Abbé. "The roundness for the fullness of your voice tell me you are a man—younger than myself by twenty years at the most. Do you not join the dance? Partners are plentiful, and introduction is unnecessary."

"Quite, as far as I am concerned," replied Napier; and then he further said: "Are you familiar with this salon?"

"God forbid, in the sense you put it," was the answer uttered with deep fervour; and then the

self, asserting that his exclamation intimated a reproach on an act which his neighbour was

Napier's reply.

A voice betokened conversation dropped.

He moved as if he was about to move. The Abbé rose and said : " You do not presume ; I own I am so too : I take advantage of your tall figure to glide more easily through this crush."

Napier wended his way to a door which led to the apartments set apart for gambling, and leant against it, as if he looked for some one, or hesitated about going further.

" Thanks to your broad shoulders and resolute stride, I have escaped from being carried away by the human tide through which we have passed," observed Napier's former companion ; " but of all places," he continued, " you have selected the worst, and the most likely to subject you to annoyance and jostle. In return for the service you have rendered me, I will escort you through these rooms

beyond, if you like. It is a curious scene, fit attendant on the one we have quitted. There they torture their muscles, here they crucify their brains, making confusion amongst mental and physical powers,—a regular devil's forcing-house."

Napier was somewhat struck by the Abbé's pertinacity. He would have declined his offer, when a light touch rested on his arm, and a voice, which he thought to be Alphonse D'Aigrigny's, whispered in his ear:—

"He is no kite or buzzard; follow him, and fear not."

Napier turned hastily round. The person whom he had expected to see was not near him. Could it then have been Marôt, the police agent, who had penetrated to his disguise, and now hovered about him? At all events, the remark set him at rest about the Abbé. He acquiesced in his proposition, casting, as he did so, a scrutinizing glance over his figure. The attitude was retiring, and accorded with the garb; it seemed the form of a man past the middle age, altogether unlike the mien of those he knew to be inimical to his interests. Passing through what seemed a reception-room, they entered.

an apartment dedicated to *rouge et noir*. Many men were here crowded round the tables ; some few out of curiosity, or with the *will*, but not the *means*, to take part in the business going on ; but most were piling on from time to time the remains of the stock of money they had brought to speculate with.

After a cursory glance around, the Abbé turned to Napier, saying : “ Do n’t you play ? ”

“ No,” was the answer ; “ I am too poor, I cannot afford so costly an amusement.”

“ Nonsense, Monsieur ; you are an Englishman, —an English gentleman, or that voice deceives me,” remarked the Abbé, intimating that the fact of Napier being an Englishman was quite a disclaimer to his plea of poverty.

“ And are you of opinion,” said Napier quietly, “ that a full purse warrants false indulgence ? Gambling seems to me too costly a pastime to be estimated at even the sacrifice of gold.”

The Abbé listened attentively to Napier’s remark. “ You speak well,” he said. “ Curse of fashion, curse of education ! There they go to wreck reputation and peace,” pointing to some men who were approaching the table. “ They think to redeem

what is already beyond reach. Madmen! but it is of little matter: most of them are already lost to their families and to society."

"What! a Frenchman," said Napier, becoming interested in his companion's ideas, "and do you maintain that a gambler is an object of such sweeping censure?"

"Yes; a Frenchman, and maintain the justice of my remark," was the reply. "When so bitter an enemy to a man's moral character becomes a passion with him, it ruins kindly traits, making the once generous heart a cold, case-hardened thing. I have travelled," he said gravely, "over many countries, and mingled with people of varied tastes and varied natures, but never mixed in a society where gentleness of feeling and humanity were extinct whilst they were protected from the ravenous hunger of gaming!"

"You speak forcibly, Monsieur," observed Napier, in a tone of greater respect than he had before used. "Your opinions should be made known to your countrymen. From the sternness of your remarks, I should suppose you had experienced the ill effect of the temptation."

"I have done so, but indirectly," answered Napier's companion in a low sad voice. "I once had a brother, a younger brother, Monsieur, of great intellectual promise, and of seeming worth. I tended his education; and high principles of honour existed together with warm and sanguine impulses. He married; his wife was a vain, ambitious woman, and grew dissatisfied with the position the young author held in society. With noble perseverance, he laboured for a time to feed her consequence and vanity. At last, sickness overtook him; and debts followed which he had not means sufficient to discharge. To want, a foul tempter leagues itself. He whose intellect had taken broad root in the opinion of virtue and honour, one night submitted to the severance of prudence from honesty. He collected the money he had hoarded to pay his debts, and stepped across the threshold of this gambling-house. In an hour he was a beggar. Now, mark how vast his misfortune in thinking that he who merits esteem had lost friends and consideration. With myself, others had laboured in secret for him. We had obtained our purpose; charity had performed well. He had been ap-

pointed to a lucrative and honourable post under government. I hastened to his dwelling with the glad tidings, with a heart bursting with delight, for great is the pleasure to bestow happiness on the deserving. He was not at home. I watched for him throughout the night, but he came not. I have never seen him since." As he concluded, the Abbé's voice sunk almost to a whisper.

"What could have become of him?" asked Napier, curiously.

"It was supposed that the cold waters of the Seine were his winding-sheet," was the answer.

Napier shuddered!—What, if such had been his brother's fate? And he stood, for a time, with a mind bitterly oppressed.

Alphonse D'Aigrigny stood by his side, who had heard the concluding part of the Abbé's remarks, and said, "Strange, you should frequent a scene which must recall so sad a circumstance?"

"Would you judge of age with the weakness of a boy's comprehension? Could you understand that I haunt this den of the foul tempter with a courage you know not, to save such as you and this young stranger by my side from my brother's fate?"

Such was this singular person's stern answer, and it was given with so much emphasis, that it nettled the fiery D'Aigrigny. He said sarcastically, "A brave labour truly; but I doubt if the morrow's experience does not sneer at to-day's work."

The Abbé was about to retort, when M. Alphonse continued, "Nay, nay!—Imagination always did oustrip facts! If life were reduced to your idea of primitive simplicity, what would be the advantage of money? I do n't like Utopian ethics. When a man talks morality out of season, I always button up my pockets. So, friend Abbé, homilies in the right place, and mirth at its hour. You are well decorated for a pious mission to the salon."

The Abbé answered in a cold, stern voice,—
"Mirth in its season!—Yes, if it be genuine.—But is it so beneath these dominos?—Does its spirit dwell yonder in the heart of wantonness?—Your tongue is faithless to your reason if you sneer not; and folly has cozened you into being her pander!"

Alphonse D'Aigrigny turned away suddenly, shrugging his shoulders, and ejaculating, "Pish!"

But Napier, though surprised and puzzled at meeting so singular a character in such a place, was not disposed to sneer; and he said,—“Your language is fervid, and I respect your sentiments. However, be under no apprehension about me, I am no gambler. It may be curiosity; it may be business that brings me here; and I shall shortly leave as little damaged in pocket as principle.”

“You have not spoken with your usual modesty,” observed this singular mentor: “for learn, that he who out of curiosity does an imprudent act to-night, cannot be sure that the same dangerous impulse will not seduce him to commit an evil one to-morrow. Even to-day’s consistency is no guarantee for prudence on the morrow. Under curiosity mankind learn the art of doing wrong. And as there is danger and temptation to the honest heart in the presence of one bad member of society, do you think it can pass quite untainted through the poisonous shade of a gambling-house? No!—Believe me, that experience gained in a place of this character bears upon itself the taint of criminality, and therefore cannot be beneficial. Avoid, if possible, the influence of so unhealthy a curiosity;

do not expose yourself to its temptations. It is far better to shun an evil than to have to eradicate it."

Napier could not help feeling the originality of his companion's remarks. He uttered, with a stern energetic will, the convictions—they seemed—of an earnest high-toned mind. Napier was interested even more than amused; and the novelty of the acquaintance with this masked philanthropist had its attraction.

For a few minutes, the Abbé stood and contemplated the system which the croupier pursued at a *rouge et noir* table near him. Then, turning to his companion, he drew him to a better view of the proceedings, and said, "My young friend, notice that croupier well. That man once possessed a fine fortune, and it went into the pockets of those whose workman he now is. When he first frequented these salons ten years ago, he was a gay, handsome man, with a mien and bearing which recommended him to the most select society. You see his countenance now. Is it not repulsive, cold, and pitiless? From that specimen before us, can we not perceive the baneful effect of indulgence in pernicious habits? Can there be a more speaking in-

dex of the evil of this lure than you perceive in that face before you? Now, turn your eye upon that young man to the right of the croupier. I know him likewise; he has been a frequenter of this place about one month; and it would have been well for him if, four weeks ago, he had known what he knows now! Still he is wedded to the lure which will assuredly work his utter ruin. Even a more potent passion, though it is the child of curiosity, is now unteaching what he has every night been taught since he resigned himself to this infatuation. You notice that he again loses. That croupier may have cheated him. Such things are common here; yet who would fancy it from the well-practised indifference which he exercises? And will you credit me, if I tell you, that the man who stakes his money and that croupier are related? They know it; and you perceive the bonds which unite them. Two hungry wolves over the carcass of a lamb would not have less consideration for each other....

"Now comes the next," continued the Abbé, in a cool matter of fact manner; "he differs from the man who stood there last; his step is light but firm, his head thrown back, and sits haughtily,—

he is no Frenchman Ah! see, he unmasks.”—Napier was greatly surprised. Yes, it was certainly his college friend Ashtonby.—“ Well,” pursued the speaker, rousing from partial abstraction, “ this individual is one of your own countrymen—pride and arrogance are in his step—he is an Englishman; I perceive it in his erect mien, in the smoothness and roundness of the muscles of his countenance, in the latent fire of his eye: in spite of assumed indifference, he is not quite at ease; the national bashfulness of your countrymen displays itself. Yes, Monsieur, he belongs to you; he will play with less caution than his predecessor. This may be his first night under the devil’s fire. Like a young soldier he is impatient and nervous. Observe that old German and his *sang froid*; he is sneering at the Englishman’s appearance of uneasiness: yet that fine young man, if he thought so, would fling that moustached individual out of the window, and return to the game with his nerves quite braced to any venture. You see he lays on a small amount; his blood is not heated yet. As I thought, he wins. Now he doubles his stake. Again he wins. This would render the old German cautious. His

luck is allowed,—a fact I assure you. He does not think so, and holds to his madness with the pertinacity of a bull-dog. Ha! now he is roused, the expression of the eye is changed. Note those full veins upon his forehead; there is a different kind of nervousness on him now. By Heaven, he has won again!—Poor fool! he is doomed. He has had enough of *rouge et noir* for the present. There are other rooms beyond: let us follow him.”

Napier assented. He felt very much interested in Ashtonby's proceedings; for, in spite of his overbearing manner and pride, he possessed many generous traits of character, which Napier appreciated.

Following closely on Ashtonby's heels, Napier and his companion entered the apartment the former had retired to. From the manner in which the occupants of that room stood, with eye and thought directed upon one person, who sat with a pile of money before him, and a pack of cards in his hands, it was evident what the infatuation was—gambling, still gambling; and the lure was presented here in the form of a Monté table. Wine was rapidly circulated; but the eye sparkled not with mirth; it was fixed upon the glittering heap of

gold. Women were here decked in apparel to embellish beauty. Pitiful sight! they had less control over their feelings than the men. Poor wretches! how savagely they sought their ruin; and although misery was in the occupation, destitution was stubbornly pursued.

A young and strikingly attractive female took an active part in the game. She seemed largely supplied with gold, which she heaped on boldly, declaring fortune must visit her, and foretelling cards which would yield a dowry; and thus from time to time she seduced the least knowing players to support her hazard. It was all a snare; the banker and she were strict confederates. Ashtonby had taken a seat by her; he was amused, not caring for the sums he lost, so that he received the fascinating girl's condolence.

A light hand was at length placed upon his arm; he looked up and saw William Neville near him. His companion noticing the interruption, whispered some words to him, when another person bent down and attracted her attention. Her eye sank in a moment, and muttering the name "Alphonse," she fell back amongst the crowd over-

whelmed with confusion. Neville drew Ashtonby from the table. "Excuse me, Ashtonby," he said: "you were in dangerous hands; when women gamble they have no mercy; better devote yourself to *rouge et noir* with your eyes shut, than trust yourself to them at a *monté table*." Alphonse D'Aigrigny was introduced to Ashtonby, and the two seated themselves apart from the general company, and chatted gaily. Sporting was their theme,—Newmarket, the Derby crack, fox-hunting, &c., &c., anything but cards; in fact, so interested seemed Neville with his friend, that one quite envied him the pleasure he experienced from this sudden meeting. A pause came at last, when Alphonse D'Aigrigny remarked:—

"Sir Thomas Ashtonby, your thoughts wander to the syren who had bewitched you. Were you fortunate in your ventures?"

"Egad," he answered, "I should say not; but the situation was novel,—light come, light go; I won a large stake at *rouge et noir*."

"Indeed," said Alphonse D'Aigrigny, carelessly; "then you are in luck to-night." And then he observed to Neville:—

"I shall step in yonder for half-an-hour: I cannot spare more time,—will you go?" While speaking, he pointed to a door that stood nearly concealed from view in a distant corner. Neville signified his willingness to accompany Alphonse D'Aigrigny; but suddenly hesitating, he said:—

"But what shall we do with Ashtonby? I cannot lose sight of him now, and he is not a member, and will not be admitted."

"I can manage it, if he wishes to see some sport," remarked D'Aigrigny, directing a glance of inquiry towards Ashtonby, who said, "O, by all means, if you will be so good;" and they proceeded to the door. It was noiselessly opened, when D'Aigrigny whispered a few words to a man in authority, upon which Sir Thomas Ashtonby was allowed to pass.

At a distance Napier had watched these proceedings. He felt a great curiosity to follow; and was moving from the spot to gratify his wish, when his companion, who had been for some time silent, said: "Whither would you?" Napier explained. "The attempt would be in vain," was the rejoinder; "the subscribers to that room are jealous of

their privileges. That is the scientific gamblers' resort,—none are idle who cross the threshold, so I have been given to understand. I am sorry I see no one about me from whom I could obtain the *entrée* for you." Napier reseated himself, greatly dissatisfied. For a few minutes the Abbé stood silently by him; at length he withdrew his gaze from an individual on whom he had bestowed a considerable amount of scrutiny and said:—

"This is but dull work; you see the phase gambling assumes in this apartment; I can find something interesting. For instance, in that room we can procure refreshment,—what say you?"

"At a later hour, willingly," observed Napier, bent on watching for Ashtonby, as he had misgivings about the proceeding of one of the men who had accompanied him; besides, he wished to rejoin D'Aigrigny.

The Abbé bowed, merely saying, "Be it so; I will shortly join you."

Napier's feelings about Ashtonby were unsatisfactory. He seriously contemplated on striving to gain admittance to the room beyond; and had half-risen from his seat to make the attempt, when

a slight figure carefully masked drew towards him. This individual seemed to direct an inquisitive eye on Napier, after having cautiously inspected the company ; and then being, it appeared, quite satisfied, he bent his head and whispered Napier's name. Napier's start seemed sufficient. " Would you have an eye upon what is going on yonder ? " asked the masked individual in a quick, energetic voice, pointing to the room on which his thoughts were fixed.

" Who are you ? Lay aside your mask that I may see if I can trust you," was the rejoinder.

The stranger did so, then immediately resumed it, saying : " Not a word ; follow me, but guardedly, and at a distance."

Napier obeyed. About the centre of the apartment he now cautiously traversed, a curtain fell, which might have been taken for the drapery of window-hangings, and this curtain was lifted by the person Napier followed ; when, to the surprise of the latter, he found himself standing in a deep recess unencumbered by furniture of any kind whatever. As if perfectly acquainted with the locality, Napier's guide touched a portion of a panel

which, by light pressure, gave him access to a small recess beyond, corresponding, though of much less size, with the one in which Napier stood. With a grasp on Napier's arm, the guide drew him in ; the place was all but dark ; a slight gleam of light only here and there obtruded under the curtain, which hung in similar manner to the one which had afforded them admittance to this secret spot.

Napier's companion drew him to the curtain which hung before this recess and whispered :—

“ I will resign my post at this hour to you for a short time,—peer through the slightest space on the left hand side,—danger attends the task, but I will be near. If you are observed, step speedily back through this panel. See, I will leave it unfixed : be watchful and wary, or you will spoil all. Will you venture ? ”

“ Yes, certainly,” whispered Napier, in reply ; “ thanks, Marôt, for the opportunity ; ” upon which the police agent cautiously retraced his steps. He perceived that the room thus exposed to partial view was smaller than the one he had left, tastefully furnished, and well lighted up. The six or

or eight card-tables distributed about at respective distances were all full, the players who sat at them deeply engrossed in the chances of their games. There was little fear of observation from them.

Napier did not waste time in observing the conduct of men who were strangers to him,—here all were unmasked. He had a friend to look after, and he sought for him eagerly. They were seated at a card-table, having, it appeared, just finished a game of *écarté*. Alphonse D'Aigrigny was shuffling a pack, offering Neville his revenge, when the latter said, (Napier could distinctly hear what passed), "No! your luck is too great for me,—I will not have anything more to do with you."

"I will try you, M. D'Aigrigny," cried Ashtonby, "fortune has favoured me to-night, and I have a fancy she will not prove altogether inconstant. And, come now, a sporting offer, I will wager a hundred on the run of games—seven, say."

"It is beyond my usual bet," replied D'Aigrigny; "but as I have been lucky I will accept the wager."

"Well, I have no objection to back Ashtonby for a trifle," remarked William Neville, and at the same time he took a seat by the side of his countryman.

The match commenced,—Ashtonby won the first two games of the seven. Being young at such work, he became excited, talked openly, and evidently quite reckoned on a continuance of his good luck. He took Neville's advice, and offered the long odds, which Alphonse D'Aigrigny, after a *little* hesitation, accepted. With the third game Ashtonby was not so fortunate,—his opponent was certainly a splendid player, *kept his countenance*, and shuffled his cards with singular adroitness. His address at the game was perfect; indeed, so politic was his manner, that it seemed quite a matter of indifference to him whether he won or lost. Yet, the combatants should have been fairly matched. William Neville had obtained a celebrity at games of skill and chance, and as he advised Ashtonby, even at D'Aigrigny's suggestion, the scale of science might be said to lean to Ashtonby's side. Indeed, a stranger would have said that D'Aigrigny was overmatched, and present appearances supported the idea, for Ashtonby won the fourth game,—holding three in the match to his opponent's one. D'Aigrigny at this point changed the cards, smiling, as he took from Neville those he had been carefully arranging for his partner. Pausing, as the dealt

cards lay on the table, prior to lifting the trump, he reflected for a minute, then offered to take the odds of three to one. Neville asserted that "Ashtonby was in great luck—D'Aigrigny was rash—of course his partner would gratify him,"—which Ashtonby did. D'Aigrigny turned a "king," played his cards, and won. Luck now frowned on Ashtonby: his opponent won the fifth and sixth game,—and Ashtonby stood to lose about three times as much on the betting as his adversary. Ill luck still frowned on the former fortunate player. Ashtonby made but a weak struggle; he had taken Neville's advice to play an indifferent hand, upon which he lost two points, and the following deal settled the match by D'Aigrigny winning the seventh game "in a canter," as he calmly pronounced it.

Ashtonby was a good deal excited. "It had been," he said, "an interesting, hard fought match, which he would play over again if M. D'Aigrigny had no objection."

Of course the gallant D'Aigrigny had none; in a few minutes there was another set-to, and it was evident from the business-like proceedings of the players that the stakes were increased. Napier had

not been an idle spectator. He knew sufficient of the game to be aware that it was, on account of the limited number of cards used, peculiarly open to sleight of hand,—*a game of countenance*, as a glance from one sitting by a player would betray the best interests of a hand to an opposite party. Far from lacking discernment, Napier had perceived before he had been many minutes observant of the proceedings of the party, that William Neville was continually playing eccentric tricks with some counters near him; one minute they were in one form, then in another, and the fancy was indulged in immediately he saw Ashtonby's cards; and this by-play was kept up until the hands were made; then it ceased, unless D'Aigrigny hesitated in his play: when he did so, Neville's head was bent carelessly over the table as he amused himself with the coloured bits of ivory with almost infantine simplicity. Napier marked this as the games drew on, and from his knowledge of Neville's character, he was led to believe that all was not as it should be. There was another point which made him suspicious,—D'Aigrigny, his assiduous friend, and Neville, his declared enemy, at the same table,

evidently on "the best of terms," as occasional remarks proved. 'Twas strange, Napier thought—for D'Aigrigny had said "that he had dropped Neville's acquaintance." Present appearances did not justify the assertion. Why the falsehood? As Napier followed up his suspicions of foul play on the part of these two men, he concluded that Neville's betting was a mere cloak, and that Ashtonby had fallen into the hands of sharpers. Something of this sort was to be revealed to him, or Marôt would not have placed him in his present position. And from the impulse of a generous nature, he felt disposed to step forth and protect Ashtonby from mischief; but his guide's warning occurred to him. Besides, as yet, he could prove nothing. It was not time to interfere; the affair would not end where it was.

"Double the stake!" cried Ashtonby, his little prudence having quite deserted him.

"Whatever you like," answered D'Aigrigny, blandly, rubbing his hands with a complacent smile.

Still Ashtonby lost. "Again," he cried; "but I have no money."

"I will keep your score," said Neville :—"I shall bet no longer—I am quite cleaned out ;" and he drew forth his card-case and pencil.

Now Ashtonby's case seemed hopeless ; he had drunk freely, and was greatly agitated.

Napier, too, was excited ; he perceived glances of a most significant kind passing from Neville to D'Aigrigny, and back. They were become far less cautious. Ashtonby sat, with his head bent, half-tipsy, and wholly bereft of his self-possession. There was not a doubt in Napier's mind that his rash friend was at the mercy of two sharpers. Napier's indignation was rising. Near him sat the man who had said, "he was too *poor* to indulge in dangerous tastes and expensive habits." The assiduous friend—the courteous companion—was a black-leg—a swindler—and in league with an individual whom Napier was compelled to estimate in a light which made him shudder. And now the idea struck Napier, "For what purpose am I lured here ? From no true desire to advance my wishes, that is certain. I must be on the alert. D'Aigrigny an accomplice in Neville's villany—of course, in Wilton's confidence ! Could it be ?—perhaps Wil-

ton's tool. They were hemming him in. Still, before he left those rooms, he resolved to expose D'Aigrigny." Such were his thoughts as he gave his attention to the proceedings near him.

The play had gone on. Ashtonby had freely allowed Neville to keep his score. He now took the paper from his hand, pored over the amount standing against him; then said, with blanched cheek and quivering lip, "A heavy sum!" and an oath followed,—“Twice the amount I thought I had lost!—The devil is in the cards!” He seemed quite stupified by his misfortune. With all his errors, until now he had shunned wholesale gambling. The tempter was still by him.

“Try one *grand coup*, Ashtonby!” whispered Neville,—“Double or quit!—I have known D'Aigrigny so silly as to consent to such a proposal. On certain nights he fancies himself invincible!”

“Yes! yes!—What say you, sir, double or quit the amount I owe you?” And Ashtonby tossed the score towards his opponent. The latter hesitated. “It is a large amount. Let Neville decide.”

Mr Neville decided. “D'Aigrigny had had great luck!—such as he had never witnessed. He should

be satisfied with the gold, and play Ashtonby one *coup* upon the score, though he confessed the chances were against him."

Ashtonby loosened his shirt-collar, and with brow rigidly knit, he said, "Now then we cut for deal." These few words fell in harsh, strange accents. They did so. D'Aigrigny dealt; and then Napier crossed the rubicon and stood before them, or rather he stood behind D'Aigrigny, facing Ashtonby and Neville. He had drawn his mask from his face, and was evidently bent on mischief. His gaze was fixed with a stern meaning on Neville's face. The latter looked up to attract his confederate's attention, when he caught Napier's eye upon him. He almost started from his chair—he was terribly confused. He saw at the moment how things were. Then all his old pride and hate came. Hate and fear mingled, and a devilish face these passions made of it. Hate seemed to triumph, for the warm blood swept as a torrent over the countenance, as he thrust back his chair and rose upon his legs.

D'Aigrigny's eyes had not been idle; he turned to see the cause of Neville's strange conduct, and found a stern, soul-searching gaze upon him.

“ Ah ! my friend ! ”—D’Aigrigny got thus far ; but it would not do. Napier’s bearing said too plainly,—“ Villain, you are known ! ” He seized the wine, drank deeply, then tried to carry off the matter with a frowning brow. But he could not act the part—he looked the skulking thief he was. There was no light in the eye ; no glow upon the cheek. He *felt* at the mercy of the man whose confidence he had vilely abused. Conscious of his rascality, he at once concluded, through what means he knew not, that Napier was in possession of the secret that, if told, would ruin him in the eyes of society. All was confusion. He played a card without waiting for Ashtonby to propose, and forgot to mark the king—which had been a very frequent guest in his hand that night. Napier kept his post. Neville stood sullenly by. He, no doubt, felt he dared not lift an eye ; he dreaded the public exposé which impended over them. The machinations of the pair were completely paralyzed. But Neville, at length, did more ; it seemed he could not endure Napier’s scrutiny—he lounged away from Ashtonby, observing, “ Play your own cards ; I am tired of it ! ”—Ashtonby did so, and made two points. Neville

drew near to D'Aigrigny's side. Upon which Napier shifted his ground, and stood by Ashtonby. Ashtonby did not notice him ; his head was bent low to the table, with a gaze upon the cards, such as a hungry beggar-boy would cast on food beyond his reach. The hand passed ;—Ashtonby added a point to his score—and then another. The next his opponent won. Upon which Neville took Ashtonby's cards and shuffled them, thinking, perhaps, it were best to appear as little concerned about Napier's presence as possible.

To Napier, however, it was a daring act, and he barely refrained from tearing the score near him, and breaking up the game. His cheek glowed from the impulse of stern and high resolve ; and as Ashtonby took the pack and was about to deal them, he leant towards him and said, " Shuffle your own cards, Ashtonby ; don't throw away your last chance." So engrossed was the man thus addressed, that he took no heed of the voice, though he did as he was requested. The faces of the men opposite to him were livid ; they evidently knew Napier to be their antagonist, and were astounded at the bold posture he assumed. Ashtonby dealt—the cards

had been fairly shuffled. He paused for a moment; then with a trembling hand he turned the trump,—it was a king; at sight of which, he bounded from the chair crying, “Won, by Heaven!” and he dashed the remainder of the pack upon the table.

“Had I lost that stake,” he said, half-hysterically, “I should have blown my brains out;” and he drank a copious draught, then sat down, resting his hands upon his knees; in pain he seemed, for the nervous system had been cruelly tortured.

It was a piteous, a degrading spectacle. A man not five-and-twenty years of age, gifted by nature in no common degree, by fortune far beyond his wants, sacrificing peace of mind, and trampling out the life of happiness, to indulge in an amusement which, his own reason had before taught him, was baneful, treacherous, and false. He had sat,—the man of warm affections, high hopes, and generous impulses, in opposition to the cold and scheming swindler. In an hour he had so committed himself, that but for a mere chance, he would have felt tempted to have sacrificed his own existence. He had this night entered that den, high in heart, prosperous beyond the reach of wealth, and blest in

many ways. An hour, and he sat with his face concealed by his hands, upon the palms of which the hot and throbbing temple was pressed with spasmodic force.

Several minutes elapsed before Ashtonby roused himself; then he recognised Napier, and he now recollected the advice he had received about shuffling his cards. He met Napier with undisguised pleasure, although, when the surprise had passed, he looked half-ashamed of his position. Neither of the other men ventured a word; perhaps they expected an exposure. Ashtonby's glance was directed to the table he had left; then he noticed Napier's grave and guarded manner: "Not friends, eh?" he said, nodding in the direction of the individuals, who were twisting the cards about in approved indifference. Napier did not reply, when Ashtonby further probed him by saying:—

"Suppose you take the cards,—new hands are always lucky. I will back you against either of these gentlemen."

Napier coolly answered: "I shall not play with your friends, and I should think you have had quite enough of it; if not, for once, Ashtonby, take my advice; it is dangerous work to play."

D'Aigrigny sprang from his seat, his brow as black as midnight as he glared on Napier. Napier paused in his remark; and after having steadily regarded for a minute the offensive attitude his false acquaintance had assumed, he said, looking hard at him :—

“Have you, sir, the temerity to dispute my right to advise my friend Sir Thomas Ashtonby to forego further play? If so, I have something further to say. Suppose I tell him that——”

A hand was laid on Napier's shoulder, and to his surprise he found it was his companion the Abbé who had interrupted him, and who was still masked: “Pray allow me one word with you,” he remarked to Napier in a whisper: “you have not dropped the ugly syllable—*forbear*;” and passing his arm through Napier's, he drew him out of ear-shot. “What would you do?” said this singular person: “come, I cannot allow you to involve yourself in so dirty a business without warning you of the consequences. That man, whom you were about to stigmatize by some severe epithet, is the wildest spirit in all Paris,—once roused, his temper is fiendish. I see you knit your brow: I insinuate

nothing injurious to your honour ; but heed me, and do not beard a tiger in his lair. This room is that man's dominion,—a dozen hands would aid him at a word. You can do no good by exposing him. Your friend cannot well give him satisfaction, as you young gallants call it, even should he scourge him from this room. Now, if you know aught of Alphonse D'Aigrigny, thank kind fortune that his true character has revealed itself, but meddle not with him ; treat him with contempt, and do not violate the rules of this salon."

Napier saw the soundness of his strange friend's advice : beside his thoughts turned to Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny ; he would save the man for the sister's sake. " You are right, Abbé," he said, " and I am obliged to you for your timely interference. If that black-leg had braved me, I should have stripped off the mask, and exposed the infamy of his conduct to those who are honourable here."

" And have been kicked out of the room for your pains," was the matter-of-fact reply ; " where villains congregate, the less said about honour and honesty the better : it is casting a bitter censure on the general company, and few like home truths

from the lips of a stranger, and in the bargain an Englishman. Now let us move away ; for with your permission I will see so comely a young gentleman safe to his hotel ; for quite enough has passed to render this place anything but safe for you. For less than you have done, many a gay coat has been rent by an awkward thrust."

" But I will take my friend with me," remarked Napier ; and beckoning Ashtonby to him, who stood somewhat mystified, apart from the throng, Napier held a brief conference with him. When it was concluded, the latter wrung Napier's hand with much earnestness, and said :—

" I can never repay you for the service you have done me. I pledge you my honour I will not play again to-night. On the morrow," muttered Ashtonby as he strode away, " I know what I will do." Poor Ashtonby ! still true to folly.

Napier returned to the Abbé, who stood waiting for him. After they had partaken of some light refreshment, the Abbé said to Napier :—

" You cast many a prying glance around ; whom seek you amongst this motley group ?"

" No matter," was the answer ; " friend or foe,

he is not here ; therefore my visit, as far as concerns myself, has been in vain."

"But not uninformative, I should say," remarked the Abbé; and then he said earnestly, "I am now about to leave this place; folly and guilt have flitted too long already before my sight; the atmosphere affects me. Still, I would not willingly leave you to the danger which impends over you; take my word for it, you are already a marked man. In the company of another you have nothing to fear—apprehend I should say—for fear I am sure is a stranger to your heart. Will you accept my escort?"

"Willingly," answered Napier, feeling well disposed to cultivate the Abbé's acquaintance; and as they passed from the salon, the latter made severe and stringent remarks on the conduct of the parties who had displayed such rapacity and villany; and in allusion to Sir Thomas Ashtonby, when touching on the generous friendship Napier had evinced, he said:—

"It is possible your interference will have done him little good; common sense is seldom attained by those whose hourly actions prove that they

despise it. Until you have had my experience, my young friend, you will find it difficult to imagine with what obstinacy, truths which one mind receives almost by intuition, will be rejected by another ; and how many artifices must be practised to procure admission, for the most evident propositions, into understandings frightened by their novelty, or hardened against them by accidental prejudice ;” and then as Napier made some remark on the errors of a government in tolerating these wholesale gambling-houses, the Abbé said :—

“ Well, if they were closed to-morrow, society would not be a whit the more virtuous. Can moral and social evil be excluded from amongst us ? From a society of human beings, placed in a state of probation, the exclusion of evil practices is impossible.”

The night was dark and gusty. The Abbé, as he plodded his way onward, continued still to talk with a collectedness and ability which greatly interested Napier ; when suddenly, on turning a corner, they came up with Langton and Count Molé, at the head of several agents of police. The Abbé now removed his mask, and Napier recognised the features of M. Marcel :—

"My task is now completed," he said, "for I have left you in safe hands. But to show you, how necessary it is for you to be on your guard, I need only tell you, that your life would have been forfeited to-night to the hostility of your enemies, had not Count Molé been informed of the stratagem, and taken all measures for your safety."

"How can I sufficiently thank you?" said Napier, pressing Marcel's hand earnestly.

"Say no more; we have striven to acquit the debt we owed your brother, for his gallant defence of Count Molé;" and, with these words, Marcel hurriedly withdrew at the head of his men.

Napier and his friends had not gone many paces from the house, when a veiled figure hastened towards them, and gazed fixedly on Napier's countenance. She stood as if she was rooted to the spot.

Count Molé whispered a hasty word to Langton, dropped Napier's arm, and stood beside the stranger, then drew her with firm but friendly hand aside, whilst Langton moved on with Napier.

"You are indiscreet, Mademoiselle," said the

Count Molé to the female he stood by. "I trusted that Pauline would have guarded against your incurring so great a risk."

"Take me home," answered the lady, in a low agitated voice; "but do not upbraid me. Did you know all, you would say that I am, that I have cause to be, painfully interested in the result of this bad, wicked business. He goes forth unscathed—he is uninjured! Oh! answer me."

"Thank God our friend is uninjured," replied the Count Molé, with much feeling. "Our arrangements were admirably successful," he added: "we have foiled a plot which could have been conceived only by the brain of a most daring villain."

A shudder convulsed the frame of the listener to this remark.

"He too! he too!" she cried with nervous apprehension; "has aught ill happened to *him*?"

"Do you allude to that dark bad-hearted man, that would be murderer and social scourge, Mademoiselle?" observed Count Molé with surprise. "Does a care for the fate of such as him rest on the heart and mind of purity and worth?" and his eye

was bent down on her shrinking form in astonishment. She laid her hand upon the soldier's arm, and said in a voice of thrilling pathos,—

“I saw him pass—‘that dark bad-hearted man’—him whose life you tell me is so full of evil; and he cursed his misery; then laughed, in such a guise, as those who lie chained in the madman's cell. I shuddered; I turned aside with horror for a moment; then I gazed again, and saw him strike his forehead with his clenched fist, and he *cursed the mother that gave him birth*. My heart was softened. I would have flown to him, had not a strong hand detained me; for, Count Molé, that ‘dark bad-hearted man’ and I were nurtured at the same breast, and I have learned to look for his smile with a sister's confidence and love. Hold this confession sacred. Breathe it to no one until you have my sanction.”

There was such utter misery in the voice, such abject sorrow in the countenance, that sympathy and pity for the suffering girl, held Count Molé's vast surprise in check.

“I promise to observe your wishes,” he said earnestly. “Poor Livia, God help you;” and as

he feared to trust himself with words, he called to Marôt, whom he saw near, and observed : " Guide us by the most unfrequented way ; this should have been avoided."

" Mademoiselle overruled my authority," was the answer, as Count Molé, with gentle force, drew his companion forward.

Napier and his friend Langton had been scarce ten minutes in their apartments when Count Molé joined them. Napier's first inquiry was about the plot to which he had been exposed.

" Well ! you have had a first specimen of his powers this way to-night, Napier," observed Count Molé ; " but for a mere accident, it would have gone hard with you without doubt. You shall hear all about it. A week or more ago, we learned of this plot against you from an unquestionable source. We thought it better to conceal the affair from you, as you might have been thrown off your guard, and spoilt the whole, as your friends, and particularly M. Marcel, were anxious to see what Wilton's intentions really were. The plan was simply devised, though a delay took place in its execution. You were to be inveigled to ' the salon ' by a very false

friend and guilty accomplice of Wilton's ; when the latter, relying on his tact and hypocrisy, was to make you his individual care. We aided his scheme, inasmuch as Marôt was to be by you, to lend his secret authority to the delusion to be practised on you, providing you were mistrustful. We knew you were to be induced to accompany Wilton, under the guise of an Abbé, but Marcel cleverly way-laid him, undertook the character himself, and with his paid agents was awaiting your arrival ; but we did not know his designs. However, when you were safely in charge at the salon, we repaired to the house Wilton had fixed on, and found Wilton's tools already in possession. They mistook us for their employer, and as we were backed by competent authority, we secured those men, who, from dread of M. Marcel, and on the promise of pardon, readily consented to betray the part they were called on to perform. We so learned how the affair was to be conducted. Wilton intended to have inveigled you into this house, and then forced a duel upon you, which would have been hardly anything but honourable murder. You know the rest."

"This scheme explains much, Napier," observed

Langton, as if he wished to extenuate the fact of allowing his friend to take so dangerous a part in the game which had been played. "Wilton is at the head and front of the mischief we seek to unravel, and every step he takes brings him nearer to his own condemnation. In struggling to free himself, he becomes further entangled. We see his purpose now, and can trust him for a little while out of our sight."

"I understand you perfectly, Langton; my mind is relieved of a portion of its burden"—(Napier must have alluded to the supposition, he was beginning to find confirmed through Wilton's active hostility, that he, more than Neville, was interested in the result of his stern inquiry relative to his missing brother); and then he remarked,—

"On my honour, villanously as Wilton has behaved, I do not entertain so great a loathing for that master-ruffian, as I do for the false and treacherous D'Aigrigny. Excuse me, Molé, but really his conduct has been most infamous. Under the guise of friendship, he has tracked me with the purpose of effecting my ruin. With Wilton, I am, and have long been, at open feud: he knows what

he has to expect, and his keen instinct forewarns him of my determination and his danger. He plots to shield himself; but Alphonse D'Aigrigny has broken a bond savages would have held sacred. To-morrow"—

"Nay, Napier, before you make a resolve, hear me," said Count Molé with stern sadness. "Your brother saved my life; my heart's best feelings in secret have attended you; and as a man of honour, who would repay a deep debt of gratitude, I would sacrifice all personal consideration to serve you. You saved a D'Aigrigny from an accident, which might have been very serious, since which a personal intercourse has added sincere regard to gratitude. Thus *we* are greatly your debtor, and if you would still preserve our friendship from stain, you will forbear in reference to him who has played so treacherous a part. From Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny I obtained the information which enabled Langton and myself to counteract this scheme of Wilton's; and, therefore, I am bold to ask you to spare the brother for the sister's sake and mine."

"You have conquered, Molé," cried Napier, with generous warmth; "he is safe at your inter-

cession ; but I must express to Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny my gratitude for the deep service she has rendered me."

"Napier, when you are calm, your own feelings of delicacy will guide you discreetly, I know," observed Count Molé ; "and you will then perceive how very painful a word from you to her, on this sad subject, would be. All you could say would not palliate her brother's infamy. Let matters rest, and, for her sake, I will make it appear that the plot was less vicious than it really was. I shall hold a certain reservation on a point or two quite excusable ;" and shortly after he quitted Napier's hotel."

"How could Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny have discovered this plot ?" asked Napier of his friend Langton.

"From her guest and companion, Livia D'Albani," was the reply, which astonished Napier not a little.

"Then pray, explain," cried Napier, eagerly ; "how was it possible that Mademoiselle D'Albani, of all people in the world, was enabled and disposed to render information that could place Wilton's safety in danger."

Langton answered: "When once in possession of facts which proved that danger impended over the head of an innocent person, I can understand that a pure, high-minded female would step forward and consider a timely warning an act of simple duty. The explanation in reference to the way in which she obtained intelligence of the plot, goes still to prove that a bad reputation is the unwitting pioneer of mischief to him who possesses it. The *eclaircissement* stands thus:—Alphonse D'Aigrigny's housekeeper happens to be the aunt of Mademoiselle D'Albani's girl, Marie. The latter was on a visit to her relative one evening, when the master of the house unexpectedly returned with a gentleman the girl did not then recognise. The aunt having cause to mistrust her master's consistency, concealed the girl in some way in a small room apart from the principal apartment, with the intention of getting her clear of the house as soon as the gentlemen were quietly settled. Much to the girl's confusion, the arrivals walked into the room wherein she was concealed, and standing near her, discussed the merits of the plot which we have frustrated, and soon afterwards departed.

"The young girl did not tell her aunt what she had

heard, but did inform her mistress. Mademoiselle D'Aigrigny was taken to her counsel,—M. Marcel was communicated with, and then an opportunity was afforded for the reporter of this scheme to declare who was M. Alphonse's confederate: then M. Marcel and ourselves arranged the rest. I have heard Mademoiselle D'Albani's distress has been severe; still she acted nobly."

"She did," cried Napier warmly, "and she has saved my life; and now she is doubly conscious of *his* villany."

END OF VOL. II.

